Weird Tales

JULY 25c

THE AVENGER FROM ATLANTIS

By EDMOND HAMILTON

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Capt. S. P. Meek

C. L. Moore

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Paul Ernst

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WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

"He transferred the brain into the body of the blind old man."

The Avenger From Atlantis

By EDMOND HAMILTON

An epic weird tale that begins in ancient Atlantis and sweeps across the dusty centuries through Egypt, Babylon and Rome, up to our own time

THE crowd of white-robed men and women in the Square of Science gave way respectfully before me as I and my servant approached. Bowing until their spotless robes swept the green marble paving, they hailed me and made an opening for me.

"Way for Ulios, for the Guardian of the Force!" they called.

And others cried, "Make room for the greatest scientist in Atlantis!"

"Friends, I thank you for your courtesy," I told them as I walked gravely through the respectful throng.

But in truth I was human enough to feel pride that they held me so highly. For in all Atlantis there was no one who did not know and honor the name of Ulios, the Guardian of the Force. And that was as it should be, since he who held the Force held Atlantis itself in the hollow of his hand.

The city seemed beautiful to me that spring morning. Under the blue sky, be-

side the blue sea, its snowy marble buildings towered in almost unreal splendor, a stainless beauty of white pillars and walls and porticoes. Over them hummed shimmering flyers, and through them ran the streets that were like rivers of green marble flowing into the lakes of the great squares.

All around me rose the great halls of science that bordered the Square of Science, towering alabaster structures that contained the laboratories in which our Atlantean scientists had wrested so many of nature's secrets from her. And at one side of the Square was a comparatively small building which outranked all the others in importance, the Hall of the Force, of which I, Ulios, was guardian and tenant.

Gathering my white robe around me, I walked up the steps of the Hall, followed by Sthan, my faithful servant. I entered and went through the corridors and courts inside to the white laboratories that were my own private workrooms. There Etain, my wife, was talking with my assistant guardian, Karnath. She ran toward me as I entered.

"Ulios, Karnath has been telling me of your experiments in transferring living brains!" she cried.

"Then Karnath has talked overmuch for my content," I told her, frowning at my underling and trying to frown also at her.

But I could not frown at Etain, nor ever be the least angry with her, and well she knew that it was so. She was not wholly of Atlantis. Her father had been one of our nobles but her mother had been of the savage tribes that dwelt in the great, wild continents to the east, and this savage woman's barbaric beauty had so entranced the noble's heart that he had captured her and then wedded her.

There was still something of the untamed in the beauty of Etain. Beautiful she was, with her night-black hair and soft black eyes that could flash yellow lights of passion, and with her white body that could be languorous and leopard-taut by turns. And well she knew the power her beauty had over me, a power so great that even now her hand on my arm and the touch of her clinging white robe stirred my pulse.

Nevertheless I told her as severely as I could, "Etain, there are some experiments which it is well to conduct but not well to publish to others. This of the brain-transference is such a one."

Karnath stepped forward and said hastily, "I only thought that it would interest the lady Etain. I meant no harm."

"No harm has been done," I told him

● Nine years ago, Weird Tales published a strange, eery story entitled "The Monster-God of Mamurth," an outstanding addition to weird literature. That story was the first story by Edmond Hamilton ever printed, and it was enthusiastically received by thousands of readers. Since then, stories have flowed in dazzling profusion from Mr. Hamilton's typewriter —short-stories, novelettes and serial novels—until today he is acknowledged as one of the few great masters of weird stories and science-fiction. He is today a leading contributor to many magazines, but the very finest of his stories are published only in Weird Tales. The accompanying story, "The Avenger from Atlantis," is an amazing tale of a weird pursuit that began in ancient Atlantis, and ended in the home of a Wall Street millionaire. We recommend it to you.

shortly. "But in future babble not of my work to anyone."

He bowed and left us, his dark, handsome face sullen and his black eyes narrowed in anger.

When he had gone, Etain asked me breathlessly, "But is it true, Ulios, that you could transfer a man's brain into another man's body? So that the first man would take up life in that other body anew?"

"I could, yes," I admitted. "I have done the thing many times with animals and corpses. But it would be an unholy thing to do it to living people and I never shall."

"Not even if I asked you to do it to *me?*" she cried.

I stared at her. "I do not understand you, Etain," I said finally. "Why in the name of all the gods should you wish your brain, your personality, transferred from your own lovely body into a different body?"

"I do not wish it now," she said. "But there will come a time when I shall wish it much, Ulios."

Her midnight eyes held my own anxiously. "Before many years my beauty will fade and I will become wrinkled and flabby and old. *Old!* A horrible fate that I dread above all others.

"But you could prevent that, Ulios! In a few years you could transfer my brain into some young and beautiful girl's body and so I would have youth and beauty again.

"And so could you regain youth yourself," she continued urgently. "You are already middle-aged, your dark hair graying and your keen eyes beginning to dull. You could take a young man's body in a few years, and we could live on so always, young and immortal."

"Etain," I told her sternly, "you know not what you say. Such immortality is not for men, and he who strove to live on in that way would be guilty of black unholiness. We are born to age and die, and not to steal the bodies of others so that we may live unendingly. Banish such thoughts as these from your mind."

Etain stared at me with an unchanging face; then she said, "I see you do not love me, Ulios," and went out of the room.

I TURNED to my work and told myself that she would soon forget her wild fancy and that I had told her nothing but the truth. Yet as I worked, her face came always before my eyes; so that at last I dashed down my instruments and went out to make amends for any hurt I had done her.

She was not in her own chambers, and I searched through the building until at last I found her down in the mighty vault underneath the building, the Chamber of the Force. This was a great domed cavern hollowed from the solid rock under the building.

At its center rose a mighty pillar of brassy metal, which was the top end of a great rod running far down into the bowels of the earth. Inside this pillar lay the keys to the Force, locked up by a door that only I, the Guardian, and Karnath, my assistant, could open.

Only two men in all Atlantis were ever allowed to know how to reach those keys, at one time. For this mighty rod tapped the colossal volcanic forces of the fires underneath our land, and while it was necessary occasionally to make use of those forces, we knew that a too careless handling of them would bring catastrophe upon us. So the Guardian of the Force and his underling watched and warded the keys.

Etain was standing beside the great brass pillar and Karnath was leaning

eagerly toward her. He was talking to her and she was listening so intently that neither of them heard my approach.

"Were you my wife, I'd not refuse you what you asked as Ulios did," Karnath was telling her. "Why should you have to age and wither and die when immortal youth and beauty are his to give?

"*I* can give you such unending youth and beauty, Etain," he continued eagerly. "I have learned well the process of brain-transference from Ulios."

"Then it is the last thing that you will ever learn from Ulios," I said freezingly.

Karnath whirled, startled, and Etain looked up quickly, though her expression did not change.

I pointed to the door. "Karnath, go! You are not worthy to be the assistant of the Guardian of the Force, and tomorrow I will pray the Council of Atlantis to depose you from your post."

His face grew black with menace and he hissed, "You know that if I am deposed I will be slain also, since only two men may know the secret keys of the Force. You wish to kill me for your jealousy."

"Go, before I forget that I am the Guardian," I told him in a cold fury, and he went.

I turned to Etain. "Why were you listening to him?"

She smiled at me, unfrightened by my sternness. "He stopped me and poured out his wild talk to me before I could get away."

"Perhaps I should report him to the Council this very hour," I said, frowning. "Karnath has revealed himself an evil man."

Etain told me, "He is a little angry, doubtless, but not dangerous. Let him go until tomorrow, Ulios."

Her soft white arms were slipping warmly around my neck and in her black eyes was that mysterious smile that always seemed to deaden my own will. I thought no more of Karnath that evening.

At midnight I was sleeping soundly in our chamber when an urgent tugging at my shoulder awakened me. I sat upright in the dark chamber to find that Etain was not beside me and that it was Sthan, my squat, faithful servant, who had awakened me.

"Master, she is gone!" he cried. "Gone with Karnath!"

A cold bell seemed to strike in my heart, and I grasped his neck and cried, "Whom do you mean?"

"The lady Etain!" exclaimed the servant. "I saw her but now run to the roof with Karnath and embark in a flyer! See, there they go now!" he added, pointing through the great open portico at the end of the chamber.

I rushed to the portico and peered out. Before me lay the sleeping white marble mass of Atlantis, crowded against the dark sea. Above it rose the sheer, blue-black heights of heaven, blazing with winking, twinkling stars. There across the star-specked skies drove a tiny light, heading eastward and rising on a long slant.

I cried in mad rage, "Karnath has offered her endless youth and life and she has fled with him!"

Then I whirled. "After them!" I shouted to Sthan. "I will overtake them and have vengeance!"

We raced up the marble stairs toward the roof of the building where the flyers were parked.

As we came out onto the starlit, gleaming roof, it and the whole building beneath us shuddered slightly. It shuddered again, a little more violently, as we ran

toward one of the long, flat, stream-lined metal flyers.

"Master, the earth rocks!" cried Sthan fearfully.

"It is but a tremor—quick, start the flyer!" I shouted to him.

I swear by all the gods that I had no suspicion of anything else! Earth tremors were common enough in Atlantis, and had I dreamed that this was anything more, I would have forsaken my pursuit.

Or would I? Sometimes I believe that in my madness at that moment I would have held to my chase even had I known all. For mad I was with jealousy and rage against the fleeing pair as the flyer that bore Sthan and myself whirled up hummingly into the starlight.

"Head straight after them!" I yelled to Sthan as we lay flat on the little flyer's deck. "Follow their light."

"I follow, master," the faithful fellow cried.

WITH insane speed we plunged headlong across the sleeping city in pursuit of that receding speck of light. Suddenly terrific gusts of wind caught our flyer and began to bat it this way and that like a leaf in a gale. The air seemed to have abruptly gone mad, and only our safety-rings kept us from being dashed off the deck. Sthan yelled hoarsely and pointed back downward.

My blood froze as I looked back. The city of Atlantis and the dark countryside beyond it were rolling and heaving like waves in a heavy sea, the solid earth buckling and folding. A horrible grinding sound came up to us.

"Gods of Atlantis!" I screamed as I saw. "Karnath opened wide the keys of the Force before he and Etain fled! He has unchained the Force to destroy all our land so that there might be none left to pursue him and the traitress!"

My own black guilt crashed home to me. I, the Guardian of the Force, had deserted my post for personal vengeance when the Force I guarded was about to annihilate our land.

"Back—turn back toward the Hall of Force!" I yelled.

But Sthan, clinging to the deck, shouted, "The flyer will not obey her helm, master!"

Whirling and tossing high in the air, we saw the swift unfolding of the cataclysm back there. The whole city and land were heaving and rumpling wildly, rapidly shaking into fragments the countless splendid marble buildings. The little white block of the Hall of Force was suddenly blown into the air by a fiery, awful uprush of flaming lava.

The sky was lit with a lurid crimson glow from this spouting fire-fountain at the center of the city. We could glimpse tiny figures of men and women and children rushing into the streets to be killed by the downfall of molten lava or the crash of marble.

The volcano at the center exploded a mountain-mass of flaming rock skyward. There was a prolonged, world-shaking roar of direst diastrophism far below, and then we saw the whole land shaken violently for a last time. Then:

"Master, the land sinks!" screamed Sthan, his eyes dilated.

Frozenly, rigidly, I stared down at the land that was being destroyed because of my neglect of my duty. With terrible grinding and grating, a long and awful chord of solemn earth-agony, the land sank downward in the dark. The foam-maned stallions of the sea rushed in wild triumph across the foundering land, a charging host of new destruction. They met the flaming volcano, and sea and fire hissed in deadly battle, filling the air with steam.

Then as our wildly gyrating flyer was whirled downward by a freak of the mad air-currents, we glimpsed through a rift in the swirling steam the last of the land sinking under the waters. A single little point of land, and on it a small marble building that gleamed a last moment in the smothering darkness. Then it was engulfed, and under us the land was all gone, and where Atlantis had stood, the great deeps of the ocean now swirled and spun.

I lifted my arms toward the sky as our flyer began to cease its gyrations.

"Gods of Atlantis, the sin is mine!" I cried. "I am the Guardian who failed his land, and I will atone with my life for that sin. But first I will find those two who also sinned, and they also shall atone. Through all eternity I will pursue them, and the vengeance of Ulios shall strike them before Ulios takes vengeance on himself!"

Sthan, chattering with fear, clinging to the deck of the rocking flyer, caught my arm. "Master, where now? There is no more Atlantis—no more Atlantis for ever!"

I pointed a quivering hand toward the paling dawn. "Eastward, after the flyer of Karnath and Etain! From henceforth, the world holds only our quest for vengeance!"

So I, Ulios of Atlantis, began the quest of vengeance and atonement that was not to end for many a weary century.

First came Sthan and I to the wild, savage lands of North Africa. It was not long until we found the flyer of Karnath and Etain, discarded by them because of the depletion of its power.

We had shortly to discard our own flyer for the same reason. But Sthan and I went on on foot, following the trail through a thousand dangers. And the traitor and traitress were now aware of our pursuit, for they fled always before us.

Barbaric tribes, and monstrous beasts, and storm and desert and mountain we conquered. A year passed, another and then another, and still we had not overtaken the two who fled before us.

Life to me had become but one thing —the quest. Somewhere, sometime, I would come up with the traitors, Karnath and Etain, who had destroyed my land for ever. I knew it. I would atone for my own sin, but first vengeance upon those two would be mine.

Sthan followed me like another shadow, stedfast and faithful, never faltering. We two, and the two we tracked, were the last four people of mighty Atlantis now left on the earth!

Year after year we hung to the trail, sometimes losing it for many months but always finding it again. I had lost all measurements of time, but knew that Sthan and I had become gray-haired.

Then one day we came upon a mound of earth near a small savage village. We dug into it and unearthed two bodies. They were the bodies of Karnath and Etain!

Karnath's hair had become gray and Etain's beauty had faded, but they were undoubtedly the two I sought. For a time I could only stare at them. How *could* I be deprived thus of my vengeance?

Then I turned their bodies over and saw that the brains were missing from their two skulls. I understood then, and wild joy filled me. I was not to be cheated of my vengeance after all.

"Sthan, look!" I told my servant. "The two we hunt are not dead after all!"

"But these are surely their bodies, master," he said, perplexed.

"Aye, but they no longer inhabit these bodies. Karnath has transferred the brain of Etain to some new, young body and

has taught her how to transfer his brain likewise into a younger form. They think they will escape me by this means, live on past me. But I will find them! You and I, Sthan, will also take new, strong bodies for ourselves so that we may continue our search."

"But I could not do a thing of marvel like that, transfer your brain to another living body," the faithful fellow protested.

"I will teach you how, Sthan. And we will be able to take new bodies whenever we grow old, just as Karnath and Etain plan to do, and thus we will follow them down through time until we find them."

WE SETTLED near the village of savages and there for some time I busied myself in preparing instruments and in teaching Sthan the delicate, wonderful process for the transference of living brains. I was in no hurry. I knew that those I pursued could not go far enough to escape me, and that they would not die. My vengeance was sure.

When Sthan, after long practise, had become expert in the operation, we abducted two young warriors from among the savages and I transferred Sthan's brain into the skull of one of them.

Sthan's new skull healed and his new nerve-connections knit to his brain almost as I watched, due to the marvelous therapeutic powers of Atlantean science. He stood upright in his new body in an hour or so, and then Sthan moved my brain into the other young savage's body.

I awoke from that operation, no longer the gray, aging Ulios, but a new Ulios, one strong and young and filled with vigor.

"Now for the pursuit again!" I told Sthan.

The trail of Karnath and Etain led us farther east across the cruel wilderness of North Africa.

A generation passed, and another, and another, while we slowly tracked the guilty pair through those mighty wilds. Time had become meaningless to us, for when we grew feeble we had but to stop and take new bodies, and those we pursued were doing the same.

We lost the trail for half a generation in great deserts and salt lakes far southward, but again we found it. It led finally northeast toward a barbaric people that had established a rudimentary civilization in the lush, fertile valley of the Nile. These people, who called their land Egypt, had but a few scraps of remembered knowledge left by Atlantean explorers long ago for the basis of their civilization. The trail of Karnath and Etain led us to a small town south of the Egyptian capital of Memphis.

We entered this place of mud huts clustered beside the tawny Nile, thronged with people in short white kirtles, who looked with curiosity at our desert garb.

Suddenly there was a stir along the street and the people bowed low as a palanquin borne by black slaves swung past. In the palanquin lay a woman of dark beauty clad in a fine, almost transparent robe, heavy snake-bracelets of gold on her wrists. Her eyes met mine a moment as she passed.

Concealing the sudden fierce joy in my breast, I asked a villager, "Who was that lady?"

"She is the wife of the noble Kahotep. They came here but recently, but have already won great favor with Pharaoh."

I told my servant, "Sthan, our search ends here."

We went to the villa of Kahotep, a square brick house surrounded by a high wall that enclosed green gardens and arbors and a pool.

As we approached the door, a half-dozen armed retainers suddenly spilled from it and overpowered us. Two people came out of the square dwelling then, a tall, powerful Egyptian with mocking eyes, and the woman I had seen.

"Greetings, Ulios!" said the tall noble mockingly. "I would never know you in that body, but Etain knew you, and so we were expecting you."

I looked at the dark, beautiful woman whom I too had instinctively recognized as Etain. Then I looked back at Karnath.

"Karnath, when your evil-doing loosed the fires that destroyed Atlantis, I and my servant alone were spared," I said. "The gods spared us because the sin of your evil deed was partly mine and to atone I must take vengeance."

Cruelly he laughed, and so too laughed Etain. "Great words for one who is in my power!" he said.

Then he continued mockingly, "Ulios, it is time that you and Sthan took new bodies. Your present ones are aging—as, alas! all bodies do—and I shall furnish you now with suitable new ones."

He uttered an order and the retainers brought two men into the courtyard. They were both very old. One of them was quite blind, without eyes, and the other was almost wholly paralyzed.

"These are the new bodies that I shall give you and Sthan," said Karnath. "Are they not strong, young, desirable bodies?"

He ordered us dragged into one of the rooms of the house, where were his instruments and preparations.

THE thing was soon done. My brain he transferred into the body of the blind old man, Sthan's into the paralytic's.

"Now," said Karnath, "you shall be taken into the desert and there you may hatch new schemes of vengeance. And as you die, bethink you of Etain and me living on—for ever."

The retainers took us far into the cruel, searing wastes of the desert and left us there. Blind and feeble, I felt the torturing blaze of the sun destroying my faint strength. But I did not despair.

"Sthan," I said to the living log that my servant now was, "we cannot die yet, for my vengeance is not achieved."

"Yes, master," whispered the faithful Sthan.

I took his paralyzed body in my arms and then, his eyes guiding my way, I started with tottering steps across the wastes.

I could not die yet—I knew it. The knowledge upheld my trembling, senile body through the terrible next two days.

How I endured in those days, without food or water, under the awful sun, dragging the paralyzed form of my servant with me, I know not. But at last we stumbled into an oasis of desert folk.

In superstitious awe of us, they treated us kindly. We soon recovered a little strength. In my blind mind still beat only one thought—Karnath and Etain! We must procure new bodies. Paralyzed, Sthan could not effect the transference of brains, so I must do it first to him. But could I, blind as I was?

I did it, the gods alone know how. Blindly, gropingly, I moved his brain into the body of the young desert dweller I had managed to ensnare and capture. When Sthan recovered, he easily secured another young man and transferred my brain into his body.

"My vengeance still waits!" I cried, young and strong once more. "Sthan, we return now to that village."

But when we re-entered it, Karnath and Etain were not there. Egypt was rent

by war, dark invaders from Ethiopia advancing on the land, and like the other terrified Egyptians, the traitor and traitress had fled down the Nile for safety.

I followed with Sthan, but nowhere in lower Egypt could I find them. The Ethiopian invasion had swept away their trail, and for four full generations Sthan and I searched before we found it again.

It led eastward and northward across the great deserts into nearer Asia. Inexorably, relentlessly, we followed it, using body after body, even as those we followed passed from body to body. Generations became centuries as we searched up through nearer Asia for those two.

Years had become like hours to us; a generation seemed but a short time. It seemed that no sooner did we assume new, young bodies than they were old and worn out and it was necessary to take still other ones.

One thing Sthan and I were ever wary of, and that was that neither of us should be killed by accident. For if but one of us were left, there would be nobody to transfer that one's brain to a fresh body and so he must die in that body.

Through peoples, wars, cities without number, we followed the trail. The rude civilizations rising in the world meant nothing to us who had seen Atlantis in her glory. Never, except perhaps in thousands of centuries, would wrecked Atlantis be equaled.

THE trail led finally to a great new city in the northeast, called Babylon. On a spring evening Sthan and I, in the guise of two Hittite chiefs, passed across a bridge over the Euphrates, dotted with round boats of skins and reeds, and approached the thick walls of Babylon.

"Sthan, our quest draws to an end. I feel that Karnath and Etain are in this city," I said.

"Then we shall find them, master."

We passed through Babylon's brass gates into streets of big mud-brick buildings thronged by the dark Chaldeans. They were dressed in long white tunics of linen and wool and wore turbans over their long hair. To our left rose the brutal bulk of the Temple of Marduk, squat and square and mighty. Farther beyond it lay the flat, extensive palaces of the king.

I stopped a passer-by and asked him, "Friend, can you tell a stranger one thing? Who is reputed the most beautiful woman in Babylon?"

He stared disdainfully at my Hittite garb and said, "Only a stranger indeed could be ignorant that Tocris, the queen of our king Nabonidus, is the most beautiful woman in Babylon and the world."

"Sthan," I said, "the two we seek have become a king and queen. For well I know that this Nabonidus and Tocris must be Karnath and Etain, since Etain would ever choose for herself the most beautiful body she could find."

That day I asked for an audience with the great king, saying that I brought homage to him from my Hittite tribe.

It was many days before my audience was granted. And when I was finally ushered into the presence of Nabonidus, they permitted only me to enter, and searched me for weapons. I chuckled grimly at their precautions, for I had a copper knife so cunningly hidden in my hair they could not find it.

Nabonidus sat on a carven stool in the cool green hanging gardens of the palace roof, overlooking the Ishtar Gate.

He had a long, dark face and suspicious eyes, and beside him sat Tocris, his queen, a tall, beautiful woman with

slumbrous eyes. "Etain!" my brain shouted.

I crawled slavishly forward, bumping my head upon the cold tile flags as the chamberlains had instructed. My heart was bursting as the moment of my age-old vengeance approached.

I raised myself, apparently overcome by awe. Nabonidus leaned forward impatiently. Instantly the knife flashed into my hand and stabbed forward at his heart.

Tocris was too quick for me. Her brooding eyes had read my intention and with tigress swiftness she knocked my arm aside.

There was a wild shouting of officers and running of guards. Held helpless by soldiers, I faced the king and queen.

Nabonidus looked more closely at me, and then his dark face smiled. And so too smiled Tocris.

"Welcome, Ulios," he said. "It was our thought that sooner or later you would come."

"Aye, and it is your thought too that sooner or later the gods will permit me to wreak their vengeance on you both," I said.

I saw haunting fear ripple swiftly over their faces a moment, the ever-present dread that had followed them down the centuries.

"You were ever a learned fool, Ulios," mocked Tocris-Etain. "Your gods will have to find a new instrument of vengeance, for here your quest ends."

"Aye, and this time there will be no escape for you as in Egypt," Nabonidus said. "All Babylon watches you die in torment tomorrow morning."

They locked me in the deepest of the palace's dungeons and set guards at my door five deep.

I slept calmly on the brick floor. I knew that I would not die.

Two hours before dawn I was awakened by a chipping and scratching. A hole appeared in the mud-brick wall and widened, and there came through it the dusty, anxious face of my servant Sthan.

"Master, I feared I could not dig to you in time!"

"You have done well, Sthan. Now we leave this hole."

"To seek out Karnath and Etain, master?"

"They are too well guarded now. We go first from this city to get new bodies, and then we will come back."

We stole out of Babylon by devious ways and made our way to the bleak plains to the north. There amid the fierce, nomadic peoples of the Medes and the Persians we acquired new bodies. I saw that these people were war-like and numerous, and I got the ear of their ruler, a powerful barbarian named Cyrus.

By dint of repeated narrations of the richness and weakness of Babylon, I so inspired him that in a short time he and all his horsemen and bowmen were pushing south toward Babylon. Sthan and I rode in the van of the Persian horse, and oh, it was sweet to be sweeping south with them toward my long-delayed vengeance on Karnath and Etain. It was sweet for us to crash through the smoking streets of terrified Babylon with the conquerors, amid whizz of arrows and death-cries of men and shrieks of fear-mad maidens, right up into the mighty, dusky throne-room of Nabonidus himself.

There Sthan and I burst in, red swords in our hands, and there we found Nabonidus and Tocris lying dead on biers.

I ran forward. My worst fears were realized. Their bodies lacked brains—they had escaped me again!

A terrified eunuch gasped, "When

your forces came near Babylon, the great king and his queen shut themselves up and called for a young warrior and a young maiden. Later the warrior and the maiden came out and went, we know not where. But we found the king and queen thus, dead."

I shook my fist amid the thunderous uproar of falling Babylon. "I will find you, Karnath and Etain! Ulios and the vengeance of Ulios still will search you out!"

STHAN and I walked the streets of another city.

"Sthan, this is Rome, Mistress of the World and Light of the Universe. What think you of it?"

"It seems a poor huddle of a place beside Atlantis, master."

"Aye, but unless I am wrong we shall find Karnath and Etain somewhere in this place."

We two, now wearing the bodies of Greek sailors, were pushing through the motley, noisy throngs in the Suburra. Hard, brutal-looking legionaries, ill-fed, scrawny paupers, oily Syrian merchants and snaky Egyptian dancing-women crowded us in the narrow way. From the squalid booths along the street came the smells of sour wine and onions and fish frying in oil. Cobblers bawled the excellence of their wares, and two soldiers staged a drunken fight a little ahead, while from the windows over our head, women brown and black and white leaned down and entreated us to enter.

"Let us get out of this madhouse, Sthan. We shall not find Karnath and Etain in this part of the city."

Six centuries had passed since Sthan and I had crashed into Babylon with Cyrus, and found our prey escaped. A dozen or more bodies had we occupied since then, as we pushed over nearer Asia and Europe in pursuit of Karnath and Etain. Through the city-states of Greece and the isles of the Egean we had sought them, with remorseless thoroughness, but always they seemed warned of our coming in time to escape. The growing greatness of this city Rome had brought us here, since it seemed to me the traitor and traitress would have come here.

Sthan and I were struggling out of the squalid Suburra when a hand tapped my shoulder. I turned and looked into the hard brown face of a helmeted captain who led a squad of legionaries.

"You are arrested by order of Tiberius Cæsar," he said, and the clanking soldiers seized us.

"We have done no wrong—we landed only this morning," I said.

"You can explain your innocence to Cæsar," he said shortly. "I am to take you before him."

AN HOUR later we were marched under heavy guard into the presence of the lord of Rome in his great house on the Palatine. Tiberius stared at us with bulging, glassy eyes. He had a bony, gray, twitching face and a vein in his forehead throbbed continually. He was an old man made older by debauchery. Beside him stood a sleek, smooth, dandified Roman with deep and subtle eyes, and a woman of superb, indolent beauty.

Her beauty gave me the clue, and I said quietly to her: "So you and Karnath were waiting for me this time, Etain?"

"Aye, Ulios, we grow weary of your stupid chase," she said, with merciless mirth that veiled in it a hint of her dread.

Karnath was telling Tiberius Cæsar, "This is the man, Cæsar. A sorcerer who has come here to Rome to poison you."

Tiberius stared at me with his glassy

eyes and said menacingly, "What have you to answer to the accusation of Maximus?"

"Cæsar, I came to Rome to kill, but not you," I told him. "It is Maximus himself whom I came here to take vengeance on. If you are wise, you will deliver him to me. For otherwise you will find that he is a snake who will soon sting you."

"It is a lie!"

Tiberius told me, "Maximus has taught me modes of pleasure I did not know before. He stands next to me in Rome, and the word of no prowling poisoner like yourself can harm him."

I understood the situation now. Karnath had secured his hold upon this old debauchee of an emperor by imparting to him some of the lore of evil pleasures he had picked up during the ages.

I smiled. "Cæsar, it is true that I am a sorcerer, but I came not to Rome to kill you," I said. "I came to give you new life."

He frowned. "What do you mean?"

I told him, "I can transfer you from that old, worn-out body of yours into another body, a young, strong one."

Tiberius' glassy eyes widened with vicious eagerness. "By my ancestors, if you could do that——" he whispered.

"But he cannot!" cried Maximus hurriedly. "Listen not to his blandishments, Cæsar!"

"I swear that I can do it," I told the emperor. "And for my pay I ask only—this man and woman to be given me!"

I saw Karnath and Etain pale at that, but Tiberius waved impatiently aside their outburst of denial and remonstrance.

His bulging eyes fixed on mine, Tiberius told me, "There is a virtuous young relative of mine who is to succeed me as emperor. All Rome is waiting for me to die so they can have him for an upright sovereign. Could you transfer me into *his* body?"

I bowed. "As easily as into any other body, Cæsar."

Tiberius burst into wild laughter. "What a joke on the people of Rome it would be, that!"

He rose. "Sorcerer, you will come to Capri with me and effect this transference. If you succeed, this man and woman are yours."

"But they will escape—I want them now!" I said.

"You will get your reward only when your work is done," he snapped. "They will be well guarded while we are gone."

I went to Capri with the old debauchee, though I misdoubted much leaving Karnath and Etain, even under guard.

The body into which I transferred Tiberius' brain was that of a young kinsman named Caligula. All Rome loved him for his modesty and virtue, and was waiting for him to succeed the evil Tiberius.

Once I had transferred the old emperor's brain into Caligula's skull, we allowed the dead body of Tiberius to be found. It was reviled by all, and Caligula was joyfully acclaimed emperor.

The new Caligula laughed and laughed. "They will soon find out what kind of emperor their virtuous pet will make."

In fact, Caligula's infamies and nameless vices began almost at once to astound the people who had hailed his accession.

"Cæsar, remember now your promise," I reminded him impatiently. "Maximus and the woman are to be mine."

But when I returned to Rome with him, I found my worst forebodings realized. Karnath and Etain had escaped. It had not been hard for them, with their craft of many ages, to outwit their

guards, and none knew whither they had fled.

"Forget them," Caligula told me. "You shall stay here and give me new bodies when I need them. You shall be second to myself."

I pretended to accede, but Sthan and I left Rome that very night. Again we sought vainly for the trail of Karnath and Etain.

"Sthan, do you grow weary of this long search?"

"No, master. Wherever you lead, I shall follow."

WE MARCHED through a thick beech wood growing dark in the sad northern twilight. Snow was sifting from the dusky sky. Sthan and I, two blond Germans wearing helmets and hauberks of chain-armor on our tall bodies, led a hard-bitten crew of a hundred of the worst desperadoes that existed in Tenth Century Saxony.

Sthan pointed up through a break in the trees to a square gray castle with turrets at its four corners and a high surrounding wall, standing out boldly on a projecting cliff against the darkening sky.

"That must be the castle of Count Otto, master! They told us he and his lady ruled all this region."

"Aye, and this Count Otto and his lady are the two we have sought so long," I said, feasting my eyes on the castle.

I turned then to our hard-bitten followers.

"We halt here," I ordered. "Sthan, bring the minstrel garbs."

Before many minutes I and my servant had shed our armor and were attired like wandering minstrels, in brown cloaks and leggings, and carrying small lutes.

Then I asked the leader of our scoundrelly crew, a battered murderer named Eckhard, "Is it clear to you what you must do?"

He nodded his surly head. "I and my men are to creep up to the castle after dark and wait for your servant to open the postern gate inside. But all the loot of the castle is to be ours!"

"The loot shall be yours," I promised. "Sthan and I want none of it."

We two left them in the snowy beechen forest and pushed up a rude track through the gathering darkness toward the castle. Once more my heart beat high with expectation. For once more I had come within reach of the vengeance that must be mine. Thirty generations had passed since Karnath and Etain had escaped me in imperial Rome. Rome had crashed beneath barbarian assaults as for century after century Sthan and I followed those two.

Twice had I almost had them in my power: once in Byzantium when Jovian ruled, and once in Cordoba where I found Karnath in the body of a Moorish emir. Both times they had given me the slip. But Sthan and I had always taken their trail again, assuming and discarding bodies every twenty or thirty years, and now we were close again to the two false ones. I swore they would not escape this time, as we climbed through the dusk and falling snow to the castle.

Count Otto's men-at-arms permitted us two wandering minstrels to enter before they closed the great gates for the night. We sat that night amid the servants in the great, gloomy stone dining-hall and devoured big shins of half-cooked beef, flinging the bones down into the rushes for the dogs to fight over.

Up at a raised table at the hall's end sat Count Otto and the lady Garda. Flushed with insolence of power was his handsome face and very fair and beautiful was the lady Garda—always Etain

had chosen the fairest bodies. But I sensed dim undertones of dread in their pride, the haunting fear of the pursuer that had accompanied them these thousands of years. And I hugged to myself the thought of the dagger in my breast which I, Ulios, would soon bury in Karnath's brain.

As the meal drew to an end I made a slight signal to Sthan and he stole out of the hall. Then, as I had expected, Count Otto called for music from the minstrels who had come to the castle that night. I stepped forward until I stood just below their dais, my lute in my arms. Looking squarely up into their faces, I plucked the lute's strings and sang.

"Far away and long ago was a land in the western sea," I sang, and saw them look up, startled.

Count Otto's face became strange, and doubt gathered and gathered in the lady Garda's eyes as I sang on.

"Sin destroyed that land, and they that sinned had fled," I sang, and then Count Otto leaped to his feet.

"Ulios!" he cried, and his men-at-arms ran to him.

"Yes, Ulios at last!" I exclaimed, flinging down my lute and snatching out my dagger.

"Seize him!" he yelled to his men, but there smote across his order a gurgling death-cry from elsewhere in the castle, and with rush of clanking feet my hundred scoundrels poured into the hall.

Sthan was at their head, and he and that loot-lusting wolfish crew swept down the men-at-arms like chaff.

With my dagger gleaming, I sprang up onto the dais at Count Otto. One moment more and my five thousand years' search for vengeance would have ended, but I forgot his lady—I forgot Etain. She darted behind me as I sprang at Karnath, and then the shouting hall rocked in light as her own jeweled little knife drove into the back of my neck.

I sank, choking blood. With failing sight I saw Karnath and Etain leap through a hidden door at the back of the dais. My wolfish followers were too intent on looting to notice.

Sthan's frenzied face bent over me. "Master!"

I pointed a quaking finger at the hidden door and choked, "Follow them—follow——"

"No, master," he cried. "You are dying—I must get your brain into another body instantly or you perish."

I pointed again at the door, then all darkened.

When I awoke, Sthan was still bending anxiously over me, but I was lying now on a couch in the castle.

I looked down at myself. A big-boned body, in chain-armor. In the mirror Sthan handed me I saw the battered face of Eckhard.

"Master, I was not one moment too soon," Sthan told me. "I stunned Eckhard and put your brain in his skull just before you died."

"And Karnath and Etain?" I asked, sitting up.

"They got away by a secret passage that no doubt they had ready for such an emergency. But we will find them again, master!"

"We will find them, Sthan."

THE Duc d'Harcourt politely offered me a silver box that contained but a few last grains of snuff. Then he sat down beside us on one of the few benches that were permitted us in this big general room of the prison.

"It is one of the worst features of this Reign of Terror that we are not even permitted to die decently. Madame la

Duchesse and I are not even given any snuff for these last days remaining to us."

Then his handsome, high-bred face smiled at me. "But I suppose we must not complain. We have long lorded this rabble that now rules France, and it is no doubt only fair that they should have a turn."

I told him, "I can understand their sending you aristocrats to the guillotine. But why should they condemn myself and my valet, two wholly innocent foreigners just arrived in France?"

The Duc looked at me and Sthan with interest. I was in the dress of a Swedish physician.

"Paris is a dangerous place for foreigners these days," he said. "More than yourselves have been condemned without reason. No doubt some enemy of yours in Paris has accused you to the Revolutionary Committee of being a reactionary."

"It may be so," I said slowly. "I have an enemy who is in Paris, I know, though I do not know just where he is."

It was true, that, for Karnath and Etain, I was sure, were somewhere in the city. I did not know what identities were theirs now, what names they had, but their trail had led Sthan and me here. It might be that Karnath was the one who had had us condemned to the guillotine, though I had been sure he could not know us in our latest guise. Or maybe only idle rumor had been the cause. In any case, I cursed the fate that had brought us to die here with my vengeance unsatisfied. Would it ever be satisfied? Would those two ever elude me, mocking phantoms I could not grasp?

Since the night eight hundred years before, when they had fled from Count Otto's castle, we had followed them through generation after generation, body after body. In Italy, Spain, across Europe and nearer Asia we had pursued but had never again been so close to them. Now in this year 1793, this red summer when France was blazing with the Terror, it seemed our search was to end for ever.

The Duc d'Harcourt rose to his feet, interrupting my dark revery.

"I must return to Madame la Duchesse. I trust that your wait for the tumbrils will not be too torturingly long, *monsieur.*"

"While we wait, we live," I reminded him.

He bowed smilingly. "And while we live, we hope, even though we know hope is quite useless. *Adieu, monsieur.*"

When he had gone I turned to my servant: "Do you too think that hope is useless, Sthan?"

"You will get us out of here, master," Sthan replied with the calm confidence of the past six thousand years.

On the very next morning a stir ran through the prison and there was a shouting and running of guards. An excited fellow prisoner told me, "The Duc and Duchesse d'Harcourt were murdered horribly during the night. A turnkey and his wife are missing and it is believed that they did it."

The bodies were brought through the general prison room at that moment. My eyes fixed on them, dilating. The skulls of the Duc and Duchesse were opened, their brains missing!

I cried in crazy rage to Sthan, "The Duc and Duchesse d'Harcourt were Karnath and Etain! They did not know us, nor we them! And they have transferred their brains into the bodies of the turnkey and his woman and have escaped us!"

"If I had only known!" said Sthan. "He sat here beside me!"

When my first wild rage cooled, I said, "They must have had instruments and

materials they needed smuggled in to them by some of the guards. If they did it, we can do it, Sthan."

We did it, and one night we walked out in the bodies of two of the guards. Feverishly we searched Paris, but Karnath and Etain were gone.

THE crash of exploding bombs rocked London in the darkness, drowning out ever and again the warning, wailing sirens and frantic bells that urged the hurrying people about us into underground shelters. In the distance great fingers of light searched the sky, sweeping back and forward. Then they held steady on a long, fish-like gray shape high in the sky above, a steadily moving Zeppelin from which high explosives continued to rain downward on the great city.

"Sthan, they are learning how to fight more efficiently as time goes by. What think you of these warriors?"

"We have seen many wars, master, but this one is the most terrible of all."

"Aye, but let them fight to their heart's content," I said. "Our business is not with their childish wars. Only I hope that none of these bombs kill Karnath and Etain. They must not die that way."

"Are you sure they are here in London, master?"

"Almost sure. We shall know in another half-hour whether this trail is false or true."

Sthan and I, two inoffensive Spaniards in appearance, walked steadily along that darkened street of London's West End, paying no attention to the crash of bombs still moving south across the city.

The sirens continued to wail, and airplanes droned by overhead in hot haste to attack the monster above. No lights showed in the whole metropolis, and no one seemed abroad on the street but us.

For a century and a quarter Sthan and I had hung grimly to our search for the two whose track we had last lost in revolutionary Paris. In all that time we had not come up to them. The far-spread tumults of the Napoleonic wars had confused our hunt for years, and then all through the Nineteenth Century the guilty two had continued to elude us. Once in the Russia of the Czars we had almost had them, but adroitly they had escaped. For a dozen years we had lost their trail utterly; then it seemed to lead us toward a British politician, whose fashionable home I and my servant were pressing now.

"Sthan, somehow I feel that our long pursuit is approaching its end," I said.

"I too feel something of that, master —a feeling I have not had before."

We rounded a corner of the dark street. The noise of bombs was now receding but no one had yet ventured abroad. Then suddenly, as we passed the mouth of a black alley, I glimpsed in it the glint of two pistols pointing straight at my head.

I could not save myself by any movement of my own, I knew. I had a lightning-instant of agonized knowledge that here my pursuit ended indeed, with lost Atlantis unavenged, my sin unatoned.

The pistols spat fire and lead. But Sthan had glimpsed them in the moment I did, and had sprung in front of me.

"Master, beware!" he yelled as he sprang, and then the roar of the pistols came and he sank to the ground.

"Sthan!" I cried, and tore the pistol from my own pocket and poured a stream of shots across my servant's prone form.

The two in the black alley who had fired at us fell as my shots struck them. I bent over Sthan's limp form.

One look was enough. Both bullets had torn through his skull and into his brain. I had lost my companion for ever.

Dazedly, I looked at the two dead men in the alley. They were of a familiar type, burly, brutal London criminals.

I knew then that Karnath and Etain had become aware of our approach and had set these men to kill me. There was no use hunting now for Karnath and Etain in London. They would have fled, I knew.

So it proved, for when I came to look for them I found that the British politician and his mistress had disappeared.

Before I started on their track, I had my loyal, stedfast companion of sixty centuries buried in an English churchyard. Over his grave I placed a stone in which was cut the legend, "STHAN OF ATLANTIS—A FAITHFUL SERVANT."

I started once more on the trail, and now with the terrible knowledge that I must find those I sought soon, or not at all. For I had now no Sthan to transfer my brain into a new body when my present one grew old. Nor could I teach anyone else how to do that, since only an Atlantean had the mind and skill to comprehend and execute that operation. None of these people could ever do it.

My present body was over forty years old. Unless I found Karnath and Etain in the next twenty or thirty years, I would die without finding them.

Alone—alone, now, for ever—I started on the last of my age-old quest for vengeance.

"JOHN HARDWICK is the most powerful man on earth!"

I turned a little toward the speaker, one of two young men sitting at the little table next mine on that Paris boulevard.

It was spring dusk and the chestnut trees above us were white with blossoms.

"Kings and princes are puppets to John Hardwick! And twenty years ago he was nobody."

I walked over to the table of my two neighbors, and said, "Your pardon for intruding, gentlemen. But I would like to learn something of this man Hardwick."

They looked up, two doubtful young men who saw in me an elderly Spaniard with graying hair and a lined, yellow face.

One of them said, "I thought everyone in the world knew of John Hardwick."

"I have been traveling a great deal during the last few years," I explained. "I have not read the daily journals."

"Well, Hardwick is an American who is the world's richest man," he said. "His fortune runs into billions, they say, and he lives in New York as though it was the capital of an invisible empire. Twenty years ago, at the time of the World War, he was just an obscure young clerk in an American city. Suddenly he began to show amazing far-sightedness and wizardry in finance, and rapidly vaulted up in power until today he is real ruler of half the world."

"And furthermore," the other added, "the husband of just about the most beautiful woman in the world."

I caught my breath. "The wife of John Hardwick is beautiful?"

"Stunningly so," he told me. "He married her shortly after he began his rise to power."

When they had gone I sat at my café table, thinking rapidly. Could this John Hardwick and his wife be Karnath and Etain?

It seemed more than possible. For the last twenty years, since I had lost my faithful Sthan in war-time London, I had found no trace of either of the treacherous twain. I had searched fiercely through

Europe for them, while my body grew older and older, my strength slipping from me. Agony of soul was mine as I saw the inexorable approach of death, whom I had cheated for so long, robbing me of my rightful revenge.

It could well be that Karnath and Etain had fled to America and there, with their millennium-gathered wisdom, had risen to power and wealth while I searched vainly for them in the Old World. Yet if I went and found them not there, the time lost might be fatal.

I stood up suddenly. I had decided to go, to gamble my vengeance on the chance that John Hardwick was Karnath.

Two days later I was aboard a huge liner bound from Marseilles to New York, heading for my last hope of finding revenge and atonement before I died.

On the broad forward decks were twinkling lanterns and an orchestra's throbbing music, and happy young men and women dancing. Back in the darkness of the stern I stood at the rail, looking down with aching heart into the black, rushing waters. Far down there in the dimness and ooze and slime lay the wrecked marbles of the land of which I, Ulios, had been Guardian. In all the slow-revolving years they had rested there in silence and darkness, their only tenant the crawling squid.

A young man and a girl, flushed with dancing, came and leaned over the rail in the darkness near me.

"Do you know, the legended Atlantis is said to lie under these very seas we're sailing," I heard him tell her.

"A city down there—how wonderful!" she exclaimed. "Is there any truth to the legend?"

"Of course not, it's just a pretty fairy-story," he said indulgently. "People used to believe it, but they know now such a city could never have existed."

Atlantis, Atlantis, shall the world ever see your like again, city of stainless white beauty beside the dark blue sea? Shall proud men and beautiful women ever again walk earth such as walked your green streets in the days of your glory?

The man and girl turned away to dance again, but I remained looking down at the rushing black waters.

The faithless twain who had cast my loved land down to doom beneath those waters still lived, still gloried in their evil. I prayed that I might be granted this last chance of vengeance and atonement.

When I reached New York, my hopes withered. For this John Hardwick and his wife who I hoped were Karnath and Etain were well-nigh utterly inaccessible. Their home was a great castle-like penthouse set on the top of a colossal skyscraper. When they were in it, armed guards watched every possible entrance. Even airplanes were forbidden over it. When John Hardwick or his wife went out of it, their car was guarded by other cars and by a dozen disguised bodyguards. The offices of the billionaire in lower New York were as heavily guarded.

For weeks I found it impossible even to see their faces. Yet I did not despair, for all this convinced me that they were so guarded because they feared something or someone greatly. And if they were Karnath and Etain, it was I, Ulios, whom they feared!

At last I had a momentary glimpse of them as they emerged one day from their great limousine. I knew at the first sight of John Hardwick's square, hard face and brilliant eyes, at the first glimpse of the woman's faultless features and secret gaze, that they were Karnath and Etain.

My heart shouted thanksgiving within

me. But still I was as far as ever from vengeance. How could I, a single, weak, aging man, hope even to gain access to this all-powerful pair?

Plan after plan I made, and had to discard. There seemed no way past the guards that always protected them. Then a plan came finally to me, one that was a slender reed indeed, but I decided to risk all upon it.

It was impossible to penetrate John Hardwick's penthouse castle when he or his wife was there. But I found it possible to enter the place during their absence. In the billionaire's study, I swiftly and secretly did that which I had planned. Then I left without anyone seeing me.

That night I went up to the door of that high stronghold again. John Hardwick and his wife were there now, and the place was ringed with guards who stopped me at once. In answer to their questions, I wrote the single word "Ulios" on a card and sent it in to the billionaire.

In a few minutes he who had taken the card in came quickly back. John Hardwick had ordered me brought in. They searched me first for weapons, so thoroughly that no tiniest one could have been concealed on me. Then they took me in.

John Hardwick sat with the woman in the study whose windows looked out across the blinking lights of New York. He took a heavy pistol from his desk and, pointing it calmly at my head, ordered the guards all to leave.

When they had gone I stood, a gray, thin old man, looking at this man and woman I had pursued across the ages.

"Well, Ulios," said Karnath to me, "what have you to say to me before I slay you?"

"Slay him now, at once!" cried Etain, her eyes wide with hate and fear as they watched me. "I trust him not!"

"Fear not, Etain—he cannot harm us now," Karnath reassured her, and said again to me, "Why do you come openly like this, Ulios?"

My voice was cracked and quavering as I answered desperately, "I came because I wish to call truce to this world-old feud of ours. Why should we hate each other for ever, Karnath? It is long ago since Atlantis sank and died, and was forgotten. Why should not we forget our hate and live in amity through time to come?"

He laughed, and the silver, scornful laughter of Etain chimed with his. And their eyes were glad with triumph now.

"Ulios, you do not deceive me," he said. "Twenty years ago we had your servant Sthan killed, and now you have no one to help you to a new body, nor can you teach any of these barbarians how to transfer your brain to another body, and you know that soon you must die for ever in that body unless one of us takes pity on you. Well, I will take pity on you, Ulios! I will end your life here and now without further waiting, and we shall be rid of your pursuit for ever, and Etain and I shall live on and on while the world lasts. Think of that, Ulios, and die!"

His finger pressed the trigger as he spat the words. But there was only an empty click from the pistol. His face suddenly fearful, Karnath pressed the trigger again and again, but no shots came forth.

It was my turn then to laugh, and laugh I did as sickly fear spread across the faces of the two.

"The bullets in that pistol will never fire, Karnath," I said. "I saw to that when I entered this room secretly today."

"Guards! Guards!" yelled Karnath, but again I only laughed.

"You sent them away yourself, so that they might not hear you kill me. Now they will not hear me kill you."

Etain darted to the door but I was ahead of her and flung her back and locked the door swiftly. Then I turned.

Karnath came out from behind his desk, raising a heavy lamp wildly to dash down upon my head.

I caught his wrist and forced him to drop it. We struggled there, and though he was the younger by many years, he was a child in my grasp. I was no longer a trembling old man. The strength of every arm in doomed Atlantis seemed in my arm.

My thin hands held his throat with a steely grip he could not break. The woman watched in frozen, paralyzed horror as I stalked steadily, remorselessly, with struggling Karnath to the windows. I forced his head back down over the ledge of the open window, his protruding eyes staring wildly up at me.

"Gods of Atlantis, look down on a sacrifice and an atonement!" I thundered, and flung Karnath clear of the window.

I saw his body go whirling downward through the darkness, and then I turned.

Etain was flattened against the wall, her eyes dilated with awful fear, her beauty all lost in horror. But she came forward, glided fearfully closer to me, her eyes pleading.

"Do not slay me, Ulios!" she begged in frantic fear. "You loved me once!"

She came closer, breathlessly wheedling and insinuating.

"Only you and I are left now, Ulios—but we two can still live on immortally. We can still transfer each other's brains to new bodies at need. I will love you, as no woman has loved before. You will do it, Ulios? You will spare me and live on with me?"

I looked at her, and smiled. I took from my pocket a tiny black tablet which I put into my mouth and swallowed.

"What are you doing?" cried Etain.

I told her, "I have just swallowed a subtle poison. In an hour I will be dead, for my vengeance and atonement are finished. You are part of that atonement, Etain. You are not going to die, you are going to live on by yourself in that body, and grow old in it. Yes, you shall experience that thing you feared most of all in the world, that to prevent which you betrayed Atlantis. *You shall grow old!*"

I walked to the door and unlocked it. "I go now to complete the record of my sin and my atonement which I have written, and then to die. Farewell, Etain."

"Ulios!" she cried, and as I went out of the door and closed it behind me I heard her hoarse scream again.

"Ulios!"

Waiter Number 34

By PAUL ERNST

Two war profiteers come face to face with one of their victims—a powerful weird story of war and death

CHATHAM KEARNS and Pierce Harkness walked leisurely toward the two chairs in the center of the Fifth Avenue window of the Console Club.

They were two choice chairs, but no one ever took them save Kearns and Harkness. Since the two had joined the club a dozen years ago, they had taken an unwritten lien on those chairs. No one ever disputed the lien: Harkness was worth nearly six hundred million dollars, and Kearns was cautiously rated at four hundred and fifty millions, though everyone knew his actual holdings totaled more than that.

The two men sat down—Kearns spare and small, like an undersized chicken hawk with frosty gray eyes and lank gray plumage; Harkness tall and corpulent, with small blue eyes like diamond points in a round, good-natured face.

"The same, Kearns?" said Harkness.

"The same," Kearns nodded, his voice dry and precise.

Harkness' big laugh boomed through the vaulted room of the Console Club.

"Vermouth! Is that a drink for a luncheon appetite? A martini would be more to the point."

"Not with my blood-pressure," said Kearns. "And not when I discuss matters of the importance of those to be decided in your board room this afternoon."

Harkness merely laughed again and flicked his gaze toward a figure in the wine-red livery of the club service near by.

The figure came toward their chairs, head inclined deferentially, face pleasant but blank. The man had an extraordinary face. It was very pale, and emaciated. His body was very thin, too, with a thinness which was exaggerated by the fact that he was nearly six feet tall.

KEARNS gave the order, frowning a little as he did so.

"A vermouth and a martini. Serve them here, please. And tell the chef we'll lunch, a little later, on the fish I had shipped up here from my Florida place."

"Very good, sir," the man murmured, bowing a little. His voice was dull, pitched in a monotone.

He started toward the club bar.

"Just a minute," Kearns' dry voice rasped.

The man came back.

"You're new here, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," the man said. "That is, I am new to most of the members, sir. I worked here many years ago—till 1917, when I left the club service to enlist."

He stood there, thin pale face impassive under Kearns' deepening frown. "Anything else, sir?" he said finally.

"No. I——" Kearns waved his hand irritably. "No. That's all."

The man left. Harkness stared at the irascible line between Kearns' frowning brows.

"What's the matter?" he asked carelessly.

"That man!" snapped Kearns. "That

"His spine was notched by a bullet and he was unable to free himself from the wire."

waiter! Number 34, I think his shield said. I don't like him."

"What's wrong with him?" said Harkness, smiling jovially.

"He has a face like a death's-head. Didn't you notice? He made me feel positively cold while he stood here."

"Kind of skinny," boomed Harkness in agreement. "What of it?"

"I just don't like him. The club should have cheerful-looking servants. I think I'll speak to the steward——"

"Oh, don't do that," said Harkness, who was a humane and kindly man. "These are rather hard times. Why throw a man out of a job just because you don't like his face?"

Kearns drew his spare shoulders up, then relaxed them. He lit the cigar Harkness passed him.

"I'll have someone else serve us in the future. . . . About this afternoon's meeting, Harkness——"

He drew at the cigar, emitting small, precise puffs of smoke.

"The decision will probably go as you and I want it to go. And just between us two—I think the time is highly propitious."

"So do I," nodded Harkness, modulating his heavy voice so that it would not carry so far. "Did you read this fellow What's-his-name's report in yesterday's *Times?* Nearly two million young fellows just out of schools and can't find jobs. Those kids would go for a good war, Kearns."

Kearns nodded.

"And the rest of the country," Harkness went on, "has more or less got over the jitters of the last war. After all, nearly a generation has passed now."

"Some of the veterans talk pretty strongly," Kearns said cautiously.

"A small minority," Harkness shrugged. "No factor to be considered, when you remember the publicity channels we control. Radio, newspapers, politicians."

THEIR waiter came toward them with their drinks on a small tray. He inclined his head—he was the acme of subservience—and set the vermouth on the stand beside Kearns and the martini on the one next to Harkness.

"I'll sign the check," said Kearns, reaching for the pad and pencil on the tray.

"No, I'll sign it," boomed Harkness.

Kearns allowed his hand to be beaten by Harkness'.

"Anything else, sir?" said the waiter, taking back the signed check with long, very white fingers.

"That's all. . . . Wait." Harkness looked in his cigar-case. "Bring me half a dozen cigars. The man at the counter knows my brand."

"Very good, sir," murmured waiter number 34.

Harkness stared after the man with a small frown on his own face. Then he looked at Kearns.

"He *is* a peculiar kind of fellow, at that, though I can't put my finger on it. He's just—peculiar. Well, no matter. As I was saying, the human material for war exists in abundance—in these young people who have nothing on earth to do with themselves. And we have our propaganda machine in perfect shape—and now we have a lighted fuse to start war with."

"Precisely," nodded Kearns, sipping at his drink. "The *All Alone* incident is made to order."

"The United States and Great Britain are trying to settle the matter peacefully, though," said Harkness, pursing his lips.

"They can't if we bring enough pressure to bear on the two governments," said Kearns, his frosty eyes colder even than their wont. "Think of the points:

"The *All Alone*, an Australian ship, is suspected of bringing dope into our country. It turns out that suspicions were based on fact, but that's neither here nor there. Our Coast Guard cutters sink the boat when it refuses to stop at a shot across her bows. You see? A ship owned by a citizen of the British Empire is sunk, and the lives of British subjects jeopardized by our Coast Guard service! A thousand wars have been started for less reason than that."

"But the British don't want to make anything of the incident," grunted Harkness. "They agree the boat had no business trying to smuggle dope into the United States——"

"They'll talk differently when our British Export branches get busy. And a protest note from them can be magnified into an ugly thing. You know that, Harkness."

"I know," said Harkness, his amiable smile beginning to make its appearance on his good-natured face. "I'm just bringing up, in advance, the objections a few of our directors may bring up this afternoon."

"Those objections will be quickly disposed of," said Kearns, lips thinning masterfully under his hawk nose. "It's war—whenever we want it—and you and I know that if no one else does!"

"Yes," nodded Kearns. "War——"

He stopped. Waiter number 34 had appeared suddenly beside them with the ordered cigars on his little tray. Harkness stared at him keenly with his little, diamond-point blue eyes. The man's emaciated white face showed no sign that he had overheard anything.

"Will that be all, sir?"

"That's all," Harkness said.

"Damn the fellow," Kearns snapped peevishly, when waiter number 34 had left. "He moves like a shadow!"

Harkness grunted, and settled down in his great leather chair a little deeper. He crossed his legs and stared out the window at the shifting human patterns on the Fifth Avenue sidewalk.

"War, Kearns! You know what that means. You remember the last one."

Kearns' commanding gray eyes narrowed almost dreamily.

"Yes. Day and night shifts in your steel mills and chemical plants. All my marginal copper mines, now closed because there isn't enough market to run them profitably, opened again. All my coal mines humming. Metal and industrial stocks up a thousand per cent."

Precise small puffs came from his lips, from a cigar which burned with microscopic evenness around the ash-edge.

"But the country as a whole profits as well, Harkness. We mustn't forget that. Jobs for thousands, renewed spirit, young men taken into the service instead of rusting in idleness—all this will happen."

"Unless the war ends too quickly," remarked Harkness.

"Again, you only anticipate some of our objecting directors in pessimism, I think," Kearns smiled. "You know we can keep war flaming for months past its normal stopping-point. . . ."

His breath hissed between his teeth. Outright anger appeared on his spare, dominant face. Waiter number 34 had materialized beside their chairs again as though out of nowhere.

"Well? Well?" he snapped to the man.

"Pardon me, sir," the waiter murmured, voice deprecating, "the chef desires to know what salad he shall prepare——"

"Tell Louis to use his own initiative. We'll leave the rest of the luncheon to him. He ought to know what we like by now, and what will go well with the fish."

"Very good, sir."

The man glided away, his tall, thin figure seeming to melt into the shadows of the huge clubroom rather than disappear normally through the end doorway.

KEARNS' eyes were icy as he gazed after him.

"Did it ever occur to you," he said to Harkness, "what a lot of things can be overheard by servants?"

"It's occurred to me many times," said

Harkness dryly. "And for that reason I try to keep servants loyal to me. You know—jolly 'em along a bit. But there's no real danger in them if you avoid quoting actual figures and facts in their hearing. . . . Say, it's confoundedly cold in here, today, isn't it?"

"It is rather chilly," Kearns acquiesced, still glaring in the direction of the door through which waiter number 34 had gone.

Harkness finished his martini and chewed at the olive in the bottom.

"No use mincing words, Kearns. We and the interests we control can make a war out of the *All Alone* incident. We shall do so, in effect, this afternoon at the board meeting. Then we can phone our brokers to buy the right stocks, and begin buying raw materials for our factories at the present peace prices. We'll need some ships of our own, too. We can buy back a lot of the bottoms we sawed off at armistice terms seventeen years ago."

Kearns' thin lips parted a little in one of his rare smiles. Small, even teeth showed for a moment.

"War, Harkness," he said slowly. "Wartime orders, wartime profits. . . . Why, I remember a statistician of mine once figured up the profits I made from the battle of Verdun alone——"

Once more a shadow fell across the two men as waiter number 34 appeared beside their chairs.

Into Kearns' frosty eyes crept an expression that would have made any of his employees tremble. But waiter number 34 seemed not to notice.

"Beg pardon, sir," he murmured in his flat, dull voice, "but I thought I heard you gentlemen mention war. Is it your opinion there will be war again soon?"

Dull red surged in Kearns' gray cheek at such colossal impudence. But Harkness shot him a glance that commanded caution.

"There are always wars, my man," he said coolly. "There has never in history been a time when war was not being waged on some portion of the earth's surface."

"But I mean war such as the last big one, sir," said the waiter deferentially. "The World War. Are we facing another such catastrophe?"

"Who can tell?" Harkness said stiffly.

"You can take these glasses away," snapped Kearns.

"Certainly, sir." Waiter number 34 inclined his head. But he moved slowly as he put the empty glasses on his little club tray, and he did not move off at once.

"And I thought I heard one of you mention the battle of Verdun. Were either of you in Verdun, might I inquire?"

Kearns' eyes were icy lightnings. But Harkness, whose rough diplomacy had been a large factor in his enormous financial success, said:

"Hardly! Do you think we're the type to make good bayonet manipulators? I think I can say that our value to our country in time of war is far greater as industrial executives than it would be as soldiers in a trench."

"Of course, sir! I can realize that. But, begging your pardon, you are both in excellent physical shape, and you are both under sixty—I thought perhaps you had been officers during the war."

"That will be all——" Kearns began in a brittle tone.

But waiter number 34 went on.

"Quite a battle, Verdun," he said, gently, abstractedly. "I was in it. I was just a kid at the time. Nineteen. And as raw as any recruit that ever was shipped to fight another man's battles for him."

"Your reminiscences are not at all——" said Kearns in a strangled tone.

"I remember one hour particularly,"

waiter number 34 said almost dreamily. "But then, it is only natural that I should remember that particular hour."

Kearns' angry gaze ranged the club-room for the steward or the assistant steward.

"It was a crowded hour, sir. I was in a sector where the shelling was hardest. The Germans had got our exact range an hour and ten minutes before, and were shelling us out of existence. And we were taking it pretty hard. Most of us in the division were youngsters, and most were as raw as myself.

"There'd been an attempt to go over the top that morning. No-man's land was littered with evidence of our failure.

"RIGHT in front of our trench there was a pile of legs and arms, where a shell had exploded in a freakish kind of way that had somehow blown bodies out of existence but left the limbs—piled 'em like an untidy little pile of cordwood. Shells do funny things sometimes, sir.

"Beside the pile was a body without a head. That had been our second lieutenant. His uniform was immaculate except for the underside of him that lay in the mud and blood. His body had been untouched. Only his head had been taken off, clean as a whistle, leaving a bit of the neck-bone sticking up.

"But we didn't mind those things so much, sir. You get sort of used to them when you fight to save your country's honor. It was something else we minded more.

"Hanging in the barbed wire was a thing almost as ripped up as any of the dead youngsters that littered the ground. This was a buddy of mine by the name of Carrigan. He'd got caught in the wire and had had his spine notched by a machine-gun bullet so that he'd been paralyzed and unable to free himself. He'd hung there ever since, still alive."

Kearns' eyes flashed into Harkness'. But Harkness shook his head almost imperceptibly, though his own face was stony with anger.

"You'd laugh, sir, if I told you all the freakish tricks I saw war play. And one of them was the way Carrigan kept on living while he hung in the barbed wire.

"The air was crowded with shrapnel pieces and bullets—actually choked with flying metal. But only a little of it hit Carrigan, and then not mortally. He seemed to hang in a charmed spot. But Carrigan didn't want to be in a charmed spot. He wanted the end to come.

"You see, first he'd had his foot taken off at the ankle, as he hung there, and the mud his legs were dragging in had somehow kept him from bleeding to death. Then he'd had half his face shot away. And finally, toward the end, a bit of shrapnel had raked across his abdomen in such a way as to slice it half open, so that he—he kept spilling his vitals, if you understand me, sir.

"It was then that he'd stopped screaming for death to take him and began—just screaming. He didn't seem to stop for breath at all. He just yelled, on and on, staring at the part of him trailing through the rip. And it was that screaming that affected us in the trench so much.

"As I say, we were just a bunch of kids, fresh out of school when we enlisted. And our minds didn't seem tough enough to stand that screaming.

"We tried to kill Carrigan, because we all had loved him. But our fingers shook a little so that none of us could hit him, any more than the bullets from the other side could. He just hung there with a broken spine, and with his foot shot off and his body sliced open like a melon, screaming on and on out of his half of a face.

"The barbed wire held him up solidly. It was fine, strong wire. I think it had

been made by one of your factories, Mr. Harkness, sir.

"You'd never believe what a body can go through before it dies. You'd have to see with your own eyes something like the drawn-out death of Carrigan. But it's hard to see a thing like that and stay sane. At least it was hard for us, his friends.

"All of us were going a little crazy, with the screaming and all, before that hour that sticks in my mind was over. And all of us were showing it in the way kids do in the trenches.

"The boy next to me—seventeen, he was, he'd lied about his age—had bitten through his lips so that I saw the white of his teeth through the red of a gash that was like a second mouth. Beyond him a farm lad a year older than myself was laughing. His laughing mingled with Carrigan's screaming, when both weren't drowned out by artillery fire, and I don't know which was worse. As he laughed he fired at Carrigan, loaded and fired, loaded and fired, and couldn't hit him.

"Down the line a youngster had finally stood up with a yell and climbed over the top to go and bayonet Carrigan. Of course he hadn't lasted very long. Three or four steps, he took, and he went down with something besides blood filling his helmet from a dozen holes in his head.

"That's all, sir. It was right after that that we started to yell as loud as we could, in a kind of chorus. And that drowned out the sound of Carrigan's yelling. It must have been a funny sight—all of us in that trench shouting, anything we could think of from prayers to blasphemy, with the farm lad's crazy laughing sounding above the rest. But then you see funny things in a war."

Waiter number 34 took a step away with his little tray on which the glasses reflected with crystal sleekness the sunlight pouring in the window of the Con sole Club.

"I hope you didn't mind my telling you these things, sir. I didn't mean to bore you—I just had the picture brought back to me, by your mention of war, of that hour when we yelled and stuffed our fingers in our ears to keep from hearing the screaming of the thing hanging in Mr. Harkness' barbed wire. Just an hour, seen by one man. It means little, of course. . . .

"It was just after we all started our yelling that a big one hit squarely in our trench and exploded."

He nodded subserviently, apologetically, and went off.

Behind him, Kearns sat rigid in his big chair, too angry for a moment to speak. Harkness' full face was apoplectic in hue.

"I'll have the steward fire him if it's the last thing I ever do!" Kearns said at last. "And I'll see to it that he's blacklisted everywhere in town! Such infernal insolence——"

"Fire him, yes," agreed Harkness, whose face had begun to get back some of its normal good-nature. "But let's not have him blacklisted, Kearns. Give the man a chance to find another job, if he can."

For Harkness was a humane and kindly man. . . .

WAITER number 34 went in through the swinging doors of the kitchen and set his tray and the empty glasses on the big dishwasher's rack. Then he moved slowly, wearily, toward the service door that opened onto narrow Eighty-fourth Street.

At the dishwashing machine a man with an artificial hand suddenly clutched the shoulder of the young fellow who assisted him. His fingers bit with a force that made the lad exclaim aloud.

"The man that just went out the door!" the dishwasher gasped. "That waiter! Who is he?"

"Number 34," growled the youngster, rubbing his shoulder.

"But his name! What's his name?"

"I don't know. He just started working here this morning——"

The man with the artificial hand ran toward the service door, opened it and looked up and down the street.

There was no sign of the figure in the wine-red club livery.

The dishwasher went back to his big machine, eyes cloudy and troubled.

"What's eating you?" said the younger man.

"That waiter—number 34," replied the dishwasher slowly. "His face looked familiar. Looked like a friend of mine that used to be a waiter here—same number, 34, too—back in 1916 when you were still a baby. But it couldn't have been him."

"Why not?" shrugged his assistant. "Guys do come back, sometimes, to work at places they worked in a long time ago."

"Not this man," said the dishwasher. "He died at Verdun in 1918."

Why Was My Dream So Real?

By JUNE POWER REILLY

Why was the dream I had last night so real?
  Why should I wake with startled breath, a scream
Upon my lips? For I could shuddering feel
  The hot flames lick my cheeks. If it were dream
Why should I have the old remembered pain?
  Where came the banners? where the soldiered place?
Where have I known the stake and jeers that rain
  Like pointed stones? where have I known disgrace?

Ah, dreams are made of things so misty, more
  Like webs of spiders, or a touch of thought;
But this was something deep, an opened door
  That opened half-way, then the hinges caught.
When just about to hear them shout my name
I woke, with agony of burning flame.

Jirel Meets Magic

By C. L. MOORE

The story of a warrior maid and the tremendous adventure that awaited her beyond the castle window—by the author of "Shambleau"

OVER Guischard's fallen drawbridge thundered Joiry's warrior lady, sword swinging, voice shouting hoarsely inside her helmet. The scarlet plume of her crest rippled in the wind. Straight into the massed defenders at the gate she plunged, careering through them by the very impetuosity of the charge, the weight of her mighty war-horse opening up a gap for the men at her heels to widen. For a while there was tumult unspeakable there under the archway, the yells of fighters and the clang of mail on mail and the screams of stricken men. Jirel of Joiry was a shouting battle-machine from which Guischard's men reeled in bloody confusion as she whirled and slashed and slew in the narrow confines of the gateway, her great stallion's iron hooves weapons as potent as her own whistling blade.

In her full armor she was impregnable to the men on foot, and the horse's armor protected him from their vengeful blades, so that alone, almost, she might have won the gateway. By sheer weight and impetuosity she carried the battle through the defenders under the arch. They gave way before the mighty war-horse and his screaming rider. Jirel's swinging sword and the stallion's trampling feet cleared a path for Joiry's men to follow, and at last into Guischard's court poured the steel-clad hordes of Guischard's conquerors.

Jirel's eyes were yellow with blood-lust behind the helmet bars, and her voice echoed savagely from the steel cage that confined it, "Giraud! Bring me Giraud! A gold piece to the man who brings me the wizard Giraud!"

She waited impatiently in the courtyard, reining her excited charger in mincing circles over the flags, unable to dismount alone in her heavy armor and disdainful of the threats of possible arbalesters in the arrow-slits that looked down upon her from Guischard's frowning gray walls. A crossbow shaft was the only thing she had to fear in her impregnable mail.

She waited in mounting impatience, a formidable figure in her bloody armor, the great sword lying across her saddle-bow and her eager, angry voice echoing hoarsely from the helmet, "Giraud! Make haste, you varlets! Bring me Giraud!"

There was such bloodthirsty impatience in that hollowly booming voice that the men who were returning from searching the castle hung back as they crossed the court toward their lady in reluctant twos and threes, failure eloquent upon their faces.

"What!" screamed Jirel furiously. "You, Giles! Have you brought me Giraud? Watkin! Where is that wizard Giraud? Answer me, I say!"

"We've scoured the castle, my lady," said one of the men fearfully as the angry voice paused. "The wizard is gone."

"Now God defend me!" groaned Joiry's lady. "God help a poor woman

"She stared with the dazed incredulity of one who knows herself in a nightmare."

served by fools! Did you search among the slain?"

"We searched everywhere, Lady Jirel. Giraud has escaped us."

Jirel called again upon her Maker in a voice that was blasphemy in itself.

"Help me down, then, you hell-spawned knaves," she grated. "I'll find him myself. He must be here!"

With difficulty they got her off the sidling horse. It took two men to handle her, and a third to steady the charger. All the while they struggled with straps and buckles she cursed them hollowly, emerging limb by limb from the casing of steel and swearing with a soldier's fluency as the armor came away. Presently she stood free on the bloody flagstones, a slim, straight lady, keen as a blade, her red hair a flame to match the flame of her yellow eyes. Under the armor she wore a tunic of link-mail from the Holy Land, supple as silk and almost as light, and a doeskin shirt to protect the milky whiteness of her skin.

She was a creature of the wildest para-

dox, this warrior lady of Joiry, hot as a red coal, chill as steel, satiny of body and iron of soul. The set of her chin was firm, but her mouth betrayed a tenderness she would have died before admitting. But she was raging now.

"Follow me, then, fools!" she shouted. "I'll find that God-cursed wizard and split his head with this sword if it takes me until the day I die. I swear it. I'll teach him what it costs to ambush Joiry men. By heaven, he'll pay with his life for my ten who fell at Massy Ford last week. The foul spell-brewer! He'll learn what it means to defy Joiry!"

Breathing threats and curses, she strode across the court, her men following reluctantly at her heels and casting nervous glances upward at the gray towers of Guischard. It had always borne a bad name, this ominous castle of the wizard Giraud, a place where queer things happened, which no man entered uninvited and whence no prisoner had ever escaped, though the screams of torture echoed often from its walls. Jirel's men would have followed her straight through the gates of hell, but they stormed Guischard at her heels with terror in their hearts and no hope of conquest.

She alone seemed not to know fear of the dark sorcerer. Perhaps it was because she had known things so dreadful that mortal perils held no terror for her—there were whispers at Joiry of their lady, and of things that had happened there which no man dared think on. But when Guischard fell, and the wizard's defenders fled before Jirel's mighty steed and the onrush of Joiry's men, they had plucked up heart, thinking that perhaps the ominous tales of Giraud had been gossip only, since the castle fell as any ordinary lord's castle might fall. But now—there were whispers again, and nervous glances over the shoulder, and men huddled together as they re-entered Guischard at their lady's hurrying heels. A castle from which a wizard might vanish into thin air, with all the exits watched, must be a haunted place, better burned and forgotten. They followed Jirel reluctantly, half ashamed but fearful.

In Jirel's stormy heart there was no room for terror as she plunged into the gloom of the archway that opened upon Guischard's great central hall. Anger that the man might have escaped her was a torch to light the way, and she paused in the door with eager anticipation, sweeping the corpse-strewn hall at a glance, searching for some clue to explain how her quarry had disappeared.

"He can't have escaped," she told herself confidently. "There's no way out. He *must* be here somewhere." And she stepped into the hall, turning over the bodies she passed with a careless foot to make sure that death had not robbed her of vengeance.

An hour later, as they searched the last tower, she was still telling herself that the wizard could not have gone without her knowledge. She had taken special pains about that. There was a secret passage to the river, but she had had that watched. And an underwater door opened into the moat, but he could not have gone that way without meeting her men. Secret paths and open, she had found them all and posted a guard at each, and Giraud had not left the castle by any door that led out. She climbed the stairs of the last tower wearily, her confidence shaken.

An iron-barred oaken door closed the top of the steps, and Jirel drew back as her men lifted the heavy cross-pieces and opened it for her. It had not been barred from within. She stepped into

the little round room inside, hope fading completely as she saw that it too was empty, save for the body of a page-boy lying on the uncarpeted floor. Blood had made a congealing pool about him, and as Jirel looked she saw something which roused her flagging hopes. Feet had trodden in that blood, not the mailed feet of armed men, but the tread of shapeless cloth shoes such as surely none but Giraud would have worn when the castle was besieged and falling, and every man's help needed. Those bloody tracks led straight across the room toward the wall, and in that wall—a window.

Jirel stared. To her a window was a narrow slit deep in stone, made for the shooting of arrows, and never covered save in the coldest weather. But this window was broad and low, and instead of the usual animal pelt for hangings a curtain of purple velvet had been drawn back to disclose shutters carved out of something that might have been ivory had any beast alive been huge enough to yield such great unbroken sheets of whiteness. The shutters were unlatched, swinging slightly ajar, and upon them Jirel saw the smear of bloody fingers.

With a little triumphant cry she sprang forward. Here, then, was the secret way Giraud had gone. What lay beyond the window she could not guess. Perhaps an unsuspected passage, or a hidden room. Laughing exultantly, she swung open the ivory shutters.

There was a gasp from the men behind her. She did not hear it. She stood quite still, staring with incredulous eyes. For those ivory gates had opened upon no dark stone hiding-place or secret tunnel. They did not even reveal the afternoon sky outside, nor did they admit the shouts of her men still subduing the last of the defenders in the court below. Instead she was looking out upon a green woodland over which brooded a violet day like no day she had ever seen before. In paralyzed amazement she looked down, seeing not the bloody flags of the courtyard far below, but a mossy carpet at a level with the floor. And on that moss she saw the mark of blood-stained feet. This window might be a magic one, opening into strange lands, but through it had gone the man she swore to kill, and where he fled she must follow.

She lifted her eyes from the tracked moss and stared out again through the dimness under the trees. It was a lovelier land than anything seen even in dreams; so lovely that it made her heart ache with its strange, unearthly enchantment—green woodland hushed and brooding in the hushed violet day. There was a promise of peace there, and forgetfulness and rest. Suddenly the harsh, shouting, noisy world behind her seemed very far away and chill. She moved forward and laid her hand upon the ivory shutters, staring out.

The shuffle of the scared men behind her awakened Jirel from the enchantment that had gripped her. She turned. The dreamy magic of the woodland loosed its hold as she faced the men again, but its memory lingered. She shook her red head a little, meeting their fearful eyes. She nodded toward the open window.

"Giraud has gone out there," she said. "Give me your dagger, Giles. This sword is too heavy to carry far."

"But lady—Lady Jirel—dear lady—you can't go out there—Saint Guilda save us! Lady Jirel!"

Jirel's crisp voice cut short the babble of protest.

"Your dagger, Giles. I've sworn to slay Giraud, and slay him I shall, in whatever land he hides. Giles!"

A man-at-arms shuffled forward with averted face, handing her his dagger. She gave him the sword she carried and thrust the long-bladed knife into her belt. She turned again to the window. Green and cool and lovely, the woodland lay waiting. She thought as she set her knee upon the sill that she must have explored this violet calm even had her oath not driven her; for there was an enchantment about the place that drew her irresistibly. She pulled up her other knee and jumped lightly. The mossy ground received her without a jar.

For a few moments Jirel stood very still, watching, listening. Bird songs trilled intermittently about her, and breezes stirred the leaves. From very far away she thought she caught the echoes of a song when the wind blew, and there was something subtly irritating about its simple melody that seemed to seesaw endlessly up and down on two notes. She was glad when the wind died and the song no longer shrilled in her ears.

It occurred to her that before she ventured far she must mark the window she had entered by, and she turned curiously, wondering how it looked from this side. What she saw sent an inexplicable little chill down her back. Behind her lay a heap of moldering ruins, moss-grown, crumbling into decay. Fire had blackened the stones in ages past. She could see that it must have been a castle, for the original lines of it were not yet quite lost. Only one low wall remained standing now, and in it opened the window through which she had come. There was something hauntingly familiar about the lines of those moldering stones, and she turned away with a vague unease, not quite understanding why. A little path wound away under the low-hanging trees, and she followed it slowly, eyes alert for signs that Giraud had passed this way. Birds trilled drowsily in the leaves overhead, queer, unrecognizable songs like the music of no birds she knew. The violet light was calm and sweet about her.

She had gone on in the bird-haunted quiet for many minutes before she caught the first hint of anything at odds with the perfect peace about her. A whiff of wood-smoke drifted to her nostrils on a vagrant breeze. When she rounded the next bend of the path she saw what had caused it. A tree lay across the way in a smother of shaking leaves and branches. She knew that she must skirt it, for the branches were too tangled to penetrate, and she turned out of the path, following the trunk toward its broken base.

She had gone only a few steps before the sound of a curious sobbing came to her ears. It was the gasp of choked breathing, and she had heard sounds like that too often before not to know that she approached death in some form or another. She laid her hand on her knife-hilt and crept forward softly.

The tree trunk had been severed as if by a blast of heat, for the stump was charred black and still smoking. Beyond the stump a queer tableau was being enacted, and she stopped quite still, staring through the leaves.

UPON the moss a naked girl was lying, gasping her life out behind the hands in which her face was buried. There was no mistaking the death-sound in that failing breath, although her body was unmarked. Hair of a strange green-gold pallor streamed over her bare white body, and by the fragility and tenuosity of that body Jirel knew that she could not be wholly human.

Above the dying girl a tall woman

stood. And that woman was a magnet for Jirel's fascinated eyes. She was generously curved, sleepy-eyed. Black hair bound her head sleekly, and her skin was like rich, dark, creamy velvet. A violet robe wrapped her carelessly, leaving arms and one curved shoulder bare, and her girdle was a snake of something like purple glass. It might have been carved from some vast jewel, save for its size and unbroken clarity. Her feet were thrust bare into silver sandals. But it was her face that held Jirel's yellow gaze.

The sleepy eyes under heavily drooping lids were purple as gems, and the darkly crimson mouth curled in a smile so hateful that fury rushed up in Jirel's heart as she watched. That lazy purple gaze dwelt aloofly upon the gasping girl on the moss. The woman was saying in a voice as rich and deep as thick-piled velvet,

"——nor will any other of the dryad folk presume to work forbidden magic in my woodlands for a long, long while to come. Your fate shall be a deadly example to them, Irsla. You dared too greatly. None who defy Jarisme live. Hear me, Irsla!"

The sobbing breath had slowed as the woman spoke, as if life were slipping fast from the dryad-girl on the moss; and as she realized it the speaker's arm lifted and a finger of white fire leaped from her outstretched hand, stabbing the white body at her feet. And the girl Irsla started like one shocked back into life.

"Hear me out, dryad! Let your end be a warning to——"

The girl's quickened breath slowed again as the white brilliance left her, and again the woman's hand rose, again the light-blade stabbed. From behind her shielding hands the dryad gasped,

"Oh, mercy, mercy, Jarisme! Let me die!"

"When I have finished. Not before. Life and death are mine to command here, and I am not yet done with you. Your stolen magic——"

She paused, for Irsla had slumped once more upon the moss, breath scarcely stirring her. As Jarisme's light-dealing hand rose for the third time Jirel leapt forward. Partly it was intuitive hatred of the lazy-eyed woman, partly revolt at this cat-and-mouse play with a dying girl for victim. She swung her arm in an arc that cleared the branches from her path, and called out in her clear, strong voice,

"Have done, woman! Let her die in peace."

Slowly Jarisme's purple eyes rose. They met Jirel's hot yellow glare. Almost physical impact was in that first meeting of their eyes, and hatred flashed between them instantly, like the flash of blades—the instinctive hatred of total opposites, born enemies. Each stiffened subtly, as cats do in the instant before combat. But Jirel thought she saw in the purple gaze, behind all its kindling anger, a faint disquiet, a nameless uncertainty.

"Who are you?" asked Jarisme, very softly, very dangerously.

Something in that unsureness behind her angry eyes prompted Jirel to answer boldly,

"Jirel of Joiry. I seek the wizard Giraud, who fled me here. Stop tormenting that wretched girl and tell me where to find him. I can make it worth your while."

Her tone was imperiously mandatory, and behind Jarisme's drooping lips an answering flare of anger lighted, almost drowning out that faint unease.

"You do not know me," she observed, her voice very gentle. "I am the sorceress Jarisme, and high ruler over all this land. Did you think to buy me, then, earth-woman?"

Jirel smiled her sweetest, most poisonous smile.

"You will forgive me," she purred. "At the first glance at you I did not think your price could be high. . . ."

A petty malice had inspired the speech, and Jirel was sorry as it left her lips, for she knew that the scorn which blazed up in Jarisme's eyes was justified. The sorceress made a contemptuous gesture of dismissal.

"I shall waste no more of my time here," she said. "Get back to your little lands, Jirel of Joiry, and tempt me no further."

The purple gaze rested briefly on the motionless dryad at her feet, flicked Jirel's hot eyes with a glance of scorn which yet did not wholly hide that curious uncertainty in its depths. One hand slid behind her, oddly as if she were seeking a door-latch in empty air. Then like a heat-shimmer the air danced about her, and in an instant she was gone.

Jirel blinked. Her ears had deceived her as well as her eyes, she thought, for as the sorceress vanished a door closed softly somewhere. Yet look though she would, the green glade was empty, the violet air untroubled. No Jarisme anywhere—no door. Jirel shrugged after a moment's bewilderment. She had met magic before.

A SOUND from the scarcely breathing girl upon the moss distracted her, and she dropped to her knees beside the dying dryad. There was no mark or wound upon her, yet Jirel knew that death could be only a matter of moments. And dimly she recalled that, so legend said, a tree-sprite never survived the death of its tree. Gently she turned the girl over, wondering if she were beyond help.

At the feel of those gentle hands the dryad's lids quivered and rose. Brook-brown eyes looked up at Jirel, with green swimming in their deeps like leaf-reflections in a woodland pool.

"My thanks to you," faltered the girl in a ghostly murmur. "But get you back to your home now—before Jarisme's anger slays you."

Jirel shook her red head stubbornly.

"I must find Giraud first, and kill him, as I have sworn to do. But I will wait. Is there anything I can do?"

The green-reflecting eyes searched hers for a moment. The dryad must have read resolution there, for she shook her head a little.

"I must die—with my tree. But if you are determined—hear me. I owe you—a debt. There is a talisman—braided in my hair. When I—am dead—take it. It is Jarisme's sign. All her subjects wear them. It will guide you to her—and to Giraud. He is ever beside her. I know. I think it was her anger at you—that made her forget to take it from me, after she had dealt me my death. But why she did not slay you—I do not know. Jarisme is quick—to kill. No matter—listen now. If you must have Giraud—you must take a risk that no one here—has ever taken—before. Break this talisman—at Jarisme's feet. I do not know—what will happen then. Something—very terrible. It releases powers—even she can not control. It may—destroy you too. But—it is—a chance May you—have—all good——"

The faltering voice failed. Jirel, bending her head, caught only meaningless murmurs that trailed away to nothing. The green-gold head dropped suddenly forward on her sustaining arm. Through the forest all about her went one long, quivering sigh, as if an intangible breeze ruffled the trees. Yet no leaves stirred.

Jirel bent and kissed the dryad's forehead, then laid her very gently back on

the moss. And as she did so her hand in the masses of strangely colored hair came upon something sharp and hard. She remembered the talisman. It tingled in her fingers as she drew it out—an odd little jagged crystal sparkling with curious aliveness from the fire burning in its heart.

When she had risen to her feet, leaving the dead dryad lying upon the moss which seemed so perfectly her couch, she saw that the inner brilliance streaming in its wedge-shaped pattern through the crystal was pointing a quivering apex forward and to the right. Irsla had said it would guide her. Experimentally she twisted her hand to the left. Yes, the shaking light shifted within the crystal, pointing always toward the right, and Jarisme.

One last long glance she gave to the dryad on the moss. Then she set off again down the path, the little magical thing stinging her hand as she walked. And as she went she wondered. This strong hatred which had flared so instinctively between her and the sorceress was hot enough to burn any trace of fear from her mind, and she remembered that look of uncertainty in the purple gaze that had shot such hatred at her. Why? Why had she not been slain as Irsla was slain, for defiance of this queer land's ruler?

For a while she paced unheedingly along under the trees. Then abruptly the foliage ceased and a broad meadow lay before her, green in the clear, violet day. Beyond the meadow the slim shaft of a tower rose dazzlingly white, and toward it in steady radiance that magical talisman pointed.

From very far away she thought she still caught the echoes of that song when the wind blew, an irritating monotony that made her ears ache. She was glad when the wind died and the song no longer shrilled in her ears.

Out across the meadow she went. Far ahead she could make out purple mountains like low clouds on the horizon, and here and there in the distances clumps of woodland dotted the meadows. She walked on more rapidly now, for she was sure that the white tower housed Jarisme, and with her Giraud. And she must have gone more swiftly than she knew, for with almost magical speed the shining shaft drew nearer.

She could see the arch of its doorway, bluely violet within. The top of the shaft was battlemented, and she caught splashes of color between the teeth of the stone scarps, as if flowers were massed there and spilling blossoms against the whiteness of the tower. The singsong music was louder than ever, and much nearer. Jirel's heart beat a bit heavily as she advanced, wondering what sort of a sorceress this Jarisme might be, what dangers lay before her in the path of her vow's fulfillment. Now the white tower rose up over her, and she was crossing the little space before the door, peering in dubiously. All she could see was dimness and violet mist.

She laid her hand upon the dagger, took a deep breath and stepped boldly in under the arch. In the instant her feet left the solid earth she saw that this violet mist filled the whole shaft of the tower, that there was no floor. Emptiness engulfed her, and all reality ceased.

She was falling through clouds of violet blankness, but in no recognizable direction. It might have been up, down, or sidewise through space. Everything had vanished in the violet nothing. She knew an endless moment of vertigo and rushing motion; then the dizzy emptiness vanished in a breath and she was standing in

a gasping surprize upon the roof of Jarisme's tower.

She knew where she was by the white battlements ringing her round, banked with strange blossoms in muted colors. In the center of the circular, marble-paved place a low couch, cushioned in glowing yellow, stood in the midst of a heap of furs. Two people sat side by side on the couch. One was Giraud. Black-robed, dark-visaged, he stared at Jirel with a flicker of disquiet in his small, dull eyes. He said nothing.

Jirel dismissed him with a glance, scarcely realizing his presence. For Jarisme had lowered from her lips a long, silver flute. Jirel realized that the queer, maddening music must have come from that gleaming length, for it no longer echoed in her ears. Jarisme was holding the instrument now in midair, regarding Jirel over it with a purple-eyed gaze that was somehow thoughtful and a little apprehensive, though anger glowed in it, too.

"So," she said richly, in her slow, deep voice. "For the second time you defy me."

At these words Giraud turned his head sharply and stared at the sorceress' impassive profile. She did not return his gaze, but after a moment he looked quickly back at Jirel, and in his eyes too she saw that flicker of alarm, and with it a sort of scared respect. It puzzled her, and she did not like being puzzled. She said a little breathlessly,

"If you like, yes. Give me that skulking potion-brewer beside you and set me down again outside this damned tower of trickery. I came to kill your pet spellmonger here for treachery done me in my own world by this creature who dared not stay to face me."

Her peremptory words hung in the air like the echoes of a gong. For a while no one spoke. Jarisme smiled more subtly than before, an insolent, slow smile that made Jirel's pulses hammer with the desire to smash it down the woman's lush, creamy throat. At last Jarisme said, in a voice as rich and deep as thick-piled velvet,

"Hot words, hot words, soldier-woman! Do you really imagine that your earthly squabbles matter to Jarisme?"

"What matters to Jarisme is of little moment to me," Jirel said contemptuously. "All I want is this skulker here, whom I have sworn to kill."

Jarisme's slow smile was maddening. "You demand it of me—Jarisme?" she asked with soft incredulity. "Only fools offend me, woman, and they but once. None commands me. You will have to learn that."

Jirel smiled thinly. "At what price, then, do you value your pet cur?"

Giraud half rose from the couch at that last insult, his dark face darker with a surge of anger. Jarisme pushed him back with a lazy hand.

"This is between your—friend—and me," she said. "I do not think, soldier" —the appellation was the deadliest of insults in the tone she used—"that any price you could offer would interest me."

"And yet your interest is very easily caught." Jirel flashed a contemptuous glance at Giraud, restive under the woman's restraining hand.

Jarisme's rich pallor flushed a little. Her voice was sharper as she said,

"Do not tempt me too far, earthling."

Jirel's yellow eyes defied her. "I am not afraid."

The sorceress' purple gaze surveyed her slowly. When Jarisme spoke again a tinge of reluctant admiration lightened the slow scorn of her voice.

"No—you are not afraid. And a fool

not to be. Fools annoy me, Jirel of Joiry."

She laid the flute down on her knee and lazily lifted a ringless hand. Anger was glowing in her eyes now, blotting out all trace of that little haunting fear. But Giraud caught the rising hand, bending, whispering urgently in her ear. Jirel caught a part of what he said, "——what happens to those who tamper with their own destiny——" And she saw the anger fade from the sorceress' face as apprehension brightened there again. Jarisme looked at Jirel with a long, hard look and shrugged her ample shoulders.

"Yes," she murmured. "Yes, Giraud. It is wisest so." And to Jirel, "Live, then, earthling. Find your way back to your own land if you can, but I warn you, do not trouble me again. I shall not stay my hand if our paths ever cross in the future."

She struck her soft, white palms together sharply. And at the sound the roof-top and the violet sky and the banked flowers at the parapets whirled around Jirel in dizzy confusion. From very far away she heard that clap of peremptory hands still echoing, but it seemed to her that the great, smokily colored blossoms were undergoing an inexplicable transformation. They quivered and spread and thrust upward from the edges of the tower to arch over her head. Her feet were pressing a mossy ground, and the sweet, earthy odors of a garden rose about her. Blinking, she stared around as the world slowly steadied.

She was no longer on the roof-top. As far as she could see through the tangled stems, great flowering plants sprang up in the gloaming of a strange, enchanted forest. She was completely submerged in greenery, and the illusion of under-water filled her eyes, for the violet light that filtered through the leaves was diffused and broken into a submarine dimness. Uncertainly she began to grope her way forward, staring about to see what sort of a miracle had enfolded her.

It was a bower in fairyland. She had come into a tropical garden of great, muted blooms and jungle silences. In the diffused light the flowers nodded sleepily among the leaves, hypnotically lovely, hypnotically soporific with their soft colors and drowsy, never-ending motion. The fragrance was overpowering. She went on slowly, treading moss that gave back no sound. Here under the canopy of leaves was a little separate world of color and silence and perfume. Dreamily she made her way among the flowers.

Their fragrance was so strongly sweet that it went to her head, and she walked in a waking dream. Because of this curious, scented trance in which she went she was never quite sure if she had actually seen that motion among the leaves, and looked closer, and made out a huge, incredible serpent of violet transparency, a giant replica of the snake that girdled Jarisme's waist, but miraculously alive, miraculously supple and gliding, miraculously twisting its soundless way among the blossoms and staring at her with impassive, purple eyes.

While it glided along beside her she had other strange visions too, and could never remember just what they were, or why she caught familiar traces in the tiny, laughing faces that peered at her from among the flowers, or half believed the wild, impossible things they whispered to her, their laughing mouths brushing her ears as they leaned down among the blossoms.

The branches began to thin at last, as

she neared the edge of the enchanted place. She walked slowly, half conscious of the great transparent snake like a living jewel writhing along soundlessly at her side, her mind vaguely troubled in its dream by the fading remembrance of what those little, merry voices had told her. When she came to the very edge of the bowery jungle and broke out into clear daylight again she stopped in a daze, staring round in the brightening light as the perfumes slowly cleared from her head.

Sanity and realization returned to her at last. She shook her red head dizzily and looked round, half expecting, despite her returning clarity, to see the great serpent gliding across the grass. But there was nothing. Of course she had dreamed. Of course those little laughing voices had not told her that—that—she clutched after the vanishing tags of remembrance, and caught nothing. Ruefully she laughed and brushed away the clinging memories, looking round to see where she was.

She stood at the crest of a little hill. Below her the flower-fragrant jungle nodded, a little patch of enchanted greenery clothing the slopes of the hill. Beyond and below green meadows stretched away to a far-off line of forest which she thought she recognized as that in which she had first met Jarisme. But the white tower which had risen in the midst of the meadows was magically gone. Where it had stood, unbroken greenery lay under the violet clarity of the sky.

As she stared round in bewilderment a faint prickling stung her palm, and she glanced down, remembering the talisman clutched in her hand. The quivering light was streaming in a long wedge toward some point behind her. She turned. She was in the foothills of those purple mountains she had glimpsed from the edge of the woods. High and shimmering, they rose above her. And, hazily in the heat-waves that danced among their heights, she saw the tower.

Jirel groaned to herself. Those peaks were steep and rocky. Well, no help for it. She must climb. She growled a soldier's oath in her throat and turned wearily toward the rising slopes. They were rough and deeply slashed with ravines. Violet heat beat up from the reflecting rocks, and tiny, brilliantly colored things scuttled from her path—orange lizards and coral red scorpions and little snakes like bright blue jewels.

It seemed to her as she stumbled upward among the broken stones that the tower was climbing too. Time after time she gained upon it, and time after time when she lifted her eyes after a grueling struggle up steep ravines, that mocking flicker of whiteness shimmered still high and unattainable on some distant peak. It had the mistiness of unreality, and if her talisman's guide had not pointed steadily upward she would have thought it an illusion to lead her astray.

But after what seemed hours of struggle, there came the time when, glancing up, she saw the shaft rising on the topmost peak of all, white as snow against the clear violet sky. And after that it shifted no more. She took heart now, for at last she seemed to be gaining. Every laborious step carried her nearer that lofty shining upon the mountain's highest peak.

She paused after a while, looking up and wiping the moisture from her forehead where the red curls clung. As she stood there something among the rocks moved, and out from behind a boulder a long, slinking feline creature came. It was not like any beast she had ever seen before. Its shining pelt was fabulously

golden, brocaded with queer patterns of darker gold, and down against its heavy jaws curved two fangs whiter than ivory. With a grace as gliding as water it paced down the ravine toward her.

Jirel's heart contracted. Somehow she found the knife-hilt in her hand, though she had no recollection of having drawn it. She was staring hard at the lovely and terrible cat, trying to understand the haunting familiarity about its eyes. They were purple, like jewels. Slowly recognition dawned. She had met that purple gaze before, insolent under sleepy lids. Jarisme's eyes. Yes, and the snake in her dream had watched her with a purple stare too. Jarisme?

She closed her hand tightly about the crystal, knowing that she must conceal from the sorceress her one potent weapon, waiting until the time came to turn it against its maker. She shifted her knife so that light glinted down the blade. They stood quite still for a moment, yellow-eyed woman and fabulous, purple-eyed cat, staring at each other with hostility eloquent in every line of each. Jirel clenched her knife tight, warily eyeing the steel-clawed paws on which the golden beast went so softly. They could have ripped her to ribbons before the blade struck home.

She saw a queer expression flicker across the somber purple gaze that met hers, and the beautiful cat crouched a little, tail jerking, lip twitched back to expose shining fangs. It was about to spring. For an interminable moment she waited for that hurtling golden death to launch itself upon her, tense, rigid, knife steady in her hand. . . .

It sprang. She dropped to one knee in the split second of its leaping, instinctively hiding the crystal, but thrusting up her dagger in defense. The great beast sailed easily over her head. As it hurtled past, a peal of derisive laughter rang in her ears, and she heard quite clearly the sound of a slamming door. She scrambled up and whirled in one motion, knife ready. The defile was quite empty in the violet day. There was no door anywhere. Jarisme had vanished.

A LITTLE shaken, Jirel sheathed her blade. She was not afraid. Anger burned out all trace of fear as she remembered the scorn in that ringing laugh. She took up her course again toward the tower, white and resolute, not looking back.

The tower was drawing near again. She toiled upward. Jarisme showed no further sign of her presence, but Jirel felt eyes upon her, purple eyes, scornful and sleepy. She could see the tower clearly, just above her at the crest of the highest peak, up to which a long arc of steps curved steeply. They were very old, these steps, so worn that many were little more than irregularities on the stone. Jirel wondered what feet had worn them so, to what door they had originally led.

She was panting when she reached the top and peered in under the arch of the door. To her surprize she found herself staring into a broad, semicircular hallway, whose walls were lined with innumerable doors. She remembered the violet nothingness into which she had stepped the last time she crossed the sill, and wondered as she thrust a tentative foot over it if the hall were an illusion and she were really about to plunge once more into that cloudy abyss of falling. But the floor was firm.

She stepped inside and paused, looking round in some bewilderment and wondering where to turn now. She could smell peril in the air. Almost she could taste the magic that hovered like a mist over the whole enchanted place. Little

warning prickles ran down her back as she went forward very softly and pushed open one of those innumerable doors. Behind it a gallery stretched down miles of haze-shrouded extent. Arrow-straight it ran, the arches of the ceiling making an endless parade that melted into violet distance. And as she stood looking down the cloudy vista, something like a puff of smoke obscured her vision for an instant—smoke that eddied and billowed and rolled away from the shape of that golden cat which had vanished in the mountain ravine.

It paced slowly down the hall toward her, graceful and lovely, muscles rippling under the brocaded golden coat and purple eyes fixed upon her in a scornful stare. Jirel's hand went to the knife in her belt, hatred choking up in her throat as she met the purple eyes. But in the corridor a voice was echoing softly, Jarisme's voice, saying,

"Then it is war between us, Jirel of Joiry. For you have defied my mercy, and you must be punished. Your punishment I have chosen—the simplest, and the subtlest, and the most terrible of all punishments, the worst that could befall a human creature. Can you guess it? No? Then wonder awhile, for I am not prepared yet to administer it fully . . . or shall I kill you now? Eh-h-h? . . ."

The curious, long-drawn query melted into a purring snarl, and the great cat's lip lifted, a flare of murderous light flaming up in the purple eyes. It had been pacing nearer all the while that light voice had echoed in the air. Now its roar crescendoed into a crashing thunder that rang from the walls, and the steel springs of its golden body tightened for a leap straight at Jirel's throat. Scarcely a dozen paces away, she saw the brocaded beauty of it crouching, taut and poised, saw the powerful body quiver and tighten—and spring. In instinctive panic she leaped back and slammed the door in its face.

Derisive laughter belled through the air. A cloud of thin smoke eddied through the crack around the door and puffed in her face with all the insolence of a blow. Then the air was clear again. The red mist of murder swam before Jirel's eyes. Blind with anger, breath beating thickly in her throat, she snatched at the door again, ripping the dagger from her belt. Through that furious haze she glared down the corridor. It was empty. She closed the door a second time and leaned against it, trembling with anger, until the mist had cleared from her head and she could control her shaking hand well enough to replace the dagger.

When she had calmed a little she turned to scan the hall, wondering what to do next. And she saw that there was no escape now, even had she wished, for the door she had entered by was gone. All about her now closed the door-studded walls, enigmatic, imprisoning. And the very fact of their presence was an insult, suggesting that Jarisme had feared she would flee if the entrance were left open. Jirel forced herself into calmness again. She was not afraid, but she knew herself in deadly peril.

She was revolving the sorceress' threat as she cast about for some indication to guide her next step. The simplest and subtlest and most terrible of punishments—what could it be? Jirel knew much of the ways of torture—her dungeons were as blood-stained as any of her neighbors'—but she knew too that Jarisme had not meant only the pain of the flesh. There was a subtler menace in her words. It would be a feminine vengeance, and more terrible than anything iron and fire could inflict. She knew that. She knew also that no door she could open now would lead to freedom, but

she could not stay quiet, waiting. She glanced along the rows of dark, identical panels. Anything that magic could contrive might lie behind them. In the face of peril more deadly than death she could not resist the temptation to pull open the nearest one and peer within.

A GUST of wind blew in her face and rattled the door. Dust was in that wind, and bitter cold. Through an inner grille of iron, locked across the opening, she saw a dazzle of whiteness like sun on snow in the instant before she slammed the door shut on the piercing gust. But the incident had whetted her curiosity. She moved along the wall and opened another.

This time she was looking through another locked grille into a dimness of gray smoke shot through with flame. The smell of burning rose in her nostrils, and she could hear faintly, as from vast distances, the sound of groans and the shivering echo of screams. Shuddering, she closed the door.

When she opened the next one she caught her breath and stared. Before her a thick crystal door separated her from bottomless space. She pressed her face to the cold glass and stared out and down. Nothingness met her gaze. Dark and silence and the blaze of unwinking stars. It was day outside the tower, but she looked into fathomless night. And as she stared, a long streak of light flashed across the blackness and faded. It was not a shooting star. By straining her eyes she could make out something like a thin sliver of silver flashing across the dark, its flaming tail fading behind it in the sky. And the sight made her ill with sudden vertigo. Bottomless void reeled around her, and she fell back into the hallway, slamming the door upon that terrifying glimpse of starry nothingness.

It was several minutes before she could bring herself to try the next door. When she did, swinging it open timorously, a familiar sweetness of flower perfume floated out and she found herself gazing through a grille of iron bars deep into that drowsy jungle of blossoms and scent and silence which she had crossed at the mountain's foot. A wave of remembrance washed over her. For an instant she could hear those tiny, laughing voices again, and she felt the presence of the great snake at her side, and the wild, mirth-ridden secrets of the little gay voices rang in her ears. Then she was awake again, and the memory vanished as dreams do, leaving nothing but tantalizing fragments of forgotten secrets drifting through her mind. She knew as she stared that she could step straight into that flowery fairyland again if the bars would open. But there was no escape from this magical place, though she might look through any number of opening doors into far lands and near.

She was beginning to understand the significance of the hall. It must be from here that Jarisme by her magical knowledge journeyed into other lands and times and worlds through the doors that opened between her domain and those strange, outland places. Perhaps she had sorcerer friends there, and paid them visits and brought back greater knowledge, stepping from world to world, from century to century, through her enchanted doorways. Jirel felt certain that one of these enigmatic openings would give upon that mountain pass where the golden cat with its scornful purple eyes had sprung at her, and vanished, and laughed backward as the door slammed upon it, and upon the woodland glade where the dryad died. But she knew that bars would close these places away even if she could find them.

She went on with her explorations. One door opened upon a steamy fern-forest of gigantic growths, out of whose deeps floated musky, reptilian odors, and the distant sound of beasts bellowing hollowly. And another upon a gray desert stretching flat and lifeless to the horizon, wan under the light of a dim red sun.

But at last she came to one that opened not into alien lands but upon a stairway winding down into solid rock whose walls showed the mark of the tools that had hollowed them. No sound came up the shaft of the stairs, and a gray light darkened down their silent reaches. Jirel peered in vain for some hint of what lay below. But at last, because inactivity had palled upon her and she knew that all ways were hopeless for escape, she entered the doorway and went slowly down the steps. It occurred to her that possibly she might find Jarisme below, engaged in some obscure magic in the lower regions, and she was eager to come to grips with her enemy.

The light darkened as she descended, until she was groping her way through obscurity round and round the curving stairs. When the steps ended at a depth she could not guess, she could tell that she had emerged into a low-roofed corridor only by feeling the walls and ceiling that met her exploring hands, for the thickest dark hid everything. She made her slow way along the stone hall, which wound and twisted and dipped at unexpected angles until she lost all sense of direction. But she knew she had gone a long way when she began to see the faint gleam of light ahead.

Presently she began to catch the far-away sound of a familiar song—Jarisme's monotonous little flute melody on two notes, and she was sure then that her intuition had been true, that the sorceress was down here somewhere. She drew her dagger in the gloom and went on more warily.

An arched opening ended the passage. Through the arch poured a blaze of dancing white luminance. Jirel paused, blinking and trying to make out what strange place she was entering. The room before her was filled with the baffling glitter and shimmer and mirage of reflecting surfaces so bewilderingly that she could not tell which was real and which mirror, and which dancing light. The brilliance dazzled in her face and dimmed into twilight and blazed again as the mirrors shifted. Little currents of dark shivered through the chaos and brightened into white sparkle once more. That monotonous music came to her through the quivering lights and reflections, now strongly, now faintly in the distance.

The whole place was a chaos of blaze and confusion. She could not know if the room were small or large, a cavern or a palace hall. Queer reflections danced through the dazzle of it. She could see her own image looking back at her from a dozen, a score, a hundred moving planes that grotesquely distorted her and then flickered out again, casting a blaze of light in her blinded eyes. Dizzily she blinked into the reeling wilderness of planes.

Then she saw Jarisme in her violet robe watching her from a hundred identical golden couches reflected upon a hundred surfaces. The figure held a flute to its lips, and the music pulsed from it in perfect time with the pulsing of the sorceress' swelling white throat. Jirel stared round in confusion at the myriad Jarismes all piping the interminable monotones. A hundred sensual, dreamy faces turned to her, a hundred

white arms dropped as the flute left a hundred red mouths that Jarisme might smile ironic welcome a hundredfold more scornful for its multiplicity.

When the music ceased, all the flashing dazzle suddenly stilled. Jirel blinked as the chaos resolved itself into shining order, the hundred Jarismes merging into one sleepy-eyed woman lounging upon her golden couch in a vast crystal-walled chamber shaped like the semicircular half of a great, round, domed room. Behind the couch a veil of violet mist hung like a curtain shutting off what would have formed the other half of the circular room.

"Enter," said the sorceress with the graciousness of one who knows herself in full command of the situation. "I thought you might find the way here. I am preparing a ceremony which will concern you intimately. Perhaps you would like to watch? This is to be an experiment, and for that reason a greater honor is to be yours than you can ever have known before; for the company I am assembling to watch your punishment is a more distinguished one than you could understand. Come here, inside the circle."

Jirel advanced, dagger still clenched in one hand, the other closed about her bit of broken crystal. She saw now that the couch stood in the center of a ring engraved in the floor with curious, cabalistic symbols. Beyond it the cloudy violet curtain swayed and eddied within itself, a vast, billowing wall of mist. Dubiously she stepped over the circle and stood eyeing Jarisme, her yellow gaze hot with rigidly curbed emotion. Jarisme smiled and lifted the flute to her lips again.

As the irritating two notes began their seesawing tune Jirel saw something amazing happen. She knew then that the flute was a magic one, and the song magical too. The notes took on a form that overstepped the boundaries of the aural and partook in some inexplicable way of all the other senses too. She could feel them, taste them, smell them, see them. In a queer way they were visible, pouring in twos from the flute and dashing outward like little needles of light. The walls reflected them, and those reflections became swifter and brighter and more numerous until the air was full of flying slivers of silvery brilliance, until shimmers began to dance among them and over them, and that bewildering shift of mirrored planes started up once more. Again reflections crossed and dazzled and multiplied in the shining air as the flute poured out its flashing double notes.

Jirel forgot the sorceress beside her, the music that grated on her ears, even her own peril, in watching the pictures that shimmered and vanished in the mirrored surfaces. She saw flashes of scenes she had glimpsed through the doors of Jarisme's hallway. She saw stranger places than that, passing in instant-brief snatches over the silvery planes. She saw jagged black mountains with purple dawns rising behind them and stars in unknown figures across the dark skies; she saw gray seas flat and motionless beneath gray clouds; she saw smooth meadows rolling horizonward under the glare of double suns. All these and many more awoke to the magic of Jarisme's flute, and melted again to give way to others.

Jirel had the strange fancy, as the music went on, that it was audible in those lands whose brief pictures were flickering across the background of its visible notes. It seemed to be piercing immeasurable distances, ringing across the cloudy seas, echoing under the double suns, calling insistently in strange

lands and far, unknown places, over deserts and mountains that man's feet had never trod, reaching other worlds and other times and crying its two-toned monotony through the darkness of interstellar space. All of this, to Jirel, was no more than a vague realization that it must be so. It meant nothing to her, whose world was a flat plane arched by the heaven-pierced bowl of the sky. Magic, she told herself, and gave up trying to understand.

Presently the tempo of the fluting changed. The same two notes still shrilled endlessly up and down, but it was no longer a clarion call ringing across borderlands into strange worlds. Now it was slower, statelier. And the notes of visible silver that had darted crazily against the crystal walls and reflected back again took on an order that ranked them into one shining plane. Upon that plane Jirel saw the outlines of a familiar scene gradually take shape. The great door-lined hall above mirrored itself in faithful replica before her eyes. The music went on changelessly.

Then, as she watched, one of those innumerable doors quivered. She held her breath. Slowly it swung open upon that gray desert under the red sun which she had seen before she closed it quickly away behind concealing panels. Again as she looked, that sense of utter desolation and weariness and despair came over her, so uncannily dreary was the scene. Now the door stood wide, its locked grille no longer closing it, and as the music went on she could see a dazzle like a jagged twist of lightning begin to shimmer in its aperture. The gleam strengthened. She saw it quiver once, twice, then sweep forward with blinding speed through the open doorway. And as she tried to follow it with her eyes another moving door distracted her.

This time the steamy fern-forest was revealed as the panels swung back. But upon the threshold sprawled something so frightful that Jirel's free hand flew to her lips and a scream beat up in her throat. It was black—shapeless and black and slimy. And it was alive. Like a heap of putrescently shining jelly it heaved itself over the door-sill and began to flow across the floor, inching its way along like a vast blind ameba. But she knew without being told that it was horribly wise, horribly old. Behind it a black trail of slime smeared the floor.

JIREL shuddered and turned her eyes away. Another door was swinging open. Through it she saw a place she had not chanced upon before, a country of bare red rock strewn jaggedly under a sky so darkly blue that it might have been black, with stars glimmering in it more clearly than stars of earth. Across this red, broken desert a figure came striding that she knew could be only a figment of magic, so tall it was, so spidery-thin, so grotesquely human despite its bulbous head and vast chest. She could not see it clearly, for about it like a robe it clutched a veil of blinding light. On those incredibly long, thin legs it stepped across the door-sill, drew its dazzling garment closer about it, and strode forward. As it neared, the light was so blinding that she could not look upon it. Her averted eyes caught the motion of a fourth door.

This time she saw that flowery ravine again, dim in its under-water illusion of diffused light. And out from among the flowers writhed a great serpent-creature, not of the transparent crystal she had seen in her dream, but iridescently scaled. Nor was it entirely serpent, for from the thickened neck sprang a head which could not be called wholly un-

human. The thing carried itself as proudly as a cobra, and as it glided across the threshold its single, many-faceted eye caught Jirel's in the reflection. The eye flashed once, dizzyingly, and she reeled back in sick shock, the violence of that glance burning through her veins like fire. When she regained control of herself many other doors were standing open upon scenes both familiar and strange. During her daze other denizens of those strange worlds must have entered at the call of the magic flute.

She was just in time to see an utterly indescribable thing flutter into the hall from a world which so violated her eyes that she got no more than a glimpse of it as she flung up outraged hands to shut it out. She did not lower that shield until Jarisme's amused voice said in an undertone, "Behold your audience, Jirel of Joiry," and she realized that the music had ceased and a vast silence was pressing against her ears. Then she looked out, and drew a long breath. She was beyond surprize and shock now, and she stared with the dazed incredulity of one who knows herself in a nightmare.

Ranged outside the circle that enclosed the two women sat what was surely the strangest company ever assembled. They were grouped with a queer irregularity which, though meaningless to Jirel, yet gave the impression of definite purpose and design. It had a symmetry so strongly marked that even though it fell outside her range of comprehension she could not but feel the rightness of it.

The light-robed dweller in the red barrens sat there, and the great black blob of shapeless jelly heaved gently on the crystal floor. She saw others she had watched enter, and many more. One was a female creature whose robe of peacock iridescence sprang from her shoulders in great drooping wings and folded round her like a bat's leathery cloak. And her neighbor was a fat gray slug of monster size, palpitating endlessly. One of the crowd looked exactly like a tall white lily swaying on a stalk of silver pallor, but from its chalice poured a light so ominously tinted that she shuddered and turned her eyes away.

Jarisme had risen from her couch. Very tall and regal in her violet robe, she rose against the back-drop of mist which veiled the other half of the room. As she lifted her arms, the incredible company turned to her with an eager expectancy. Jirel shuddered. Then Jarisme's flute spoke softly. It was a different sort of music from the clarion that called them together, from the stately melody which welcomed them through the opening doors. But it harped still on the two seesawing notes, with low, rippling sounds so different from the other two that Jirel marveled at the range of the sorceress' ability on the two notes.

For a few moments as the song went on, nothing happened. Then a motion behind Jarisme caught Jirel's eye. The curtain of violet mist was swaying. The music beat at it and it quivered to the tune. It shook within itself, and paled and thinned, and from behind it a light began to glow. Then on a last low monotone it dissipated wholly and Jirel was staring at a vast globe of quivering light which loomed up under the stupendous arch that soared outward to form the second half of the chamber.

As the last clouds faded she saw that the thing was a huge crystal sphere, rising upon the coils of a translucent purple base in the shape of a serpent. And in the heart of the globe burned a still flame, living, animate, instinct with a life so alien that Jirel stared in utter bewilderment. It was a thing she knew

to be alive—yet she knew it could *not* be alive. But she recognized even in her daze of incomprehension its relation to the tiny fragment of crystal she clutched in her hand. In that too the still flame burned. It stung her hand faintly in reminder that she possessed a weapon which could destroy Jarisme, though it might destroy its wielder in the process. The thought gave her a sort of desperate courage.

Jarisme was ignoring her now. She had turned to face the great globe with lifted arms and shining head thrown back. And from her lips a piercingly sweet sound fluted, midway between hum and whistle. Jirel had the wild fancy that she could see that sound arrowing straight into the heart of the vast sphere bulking so high over them all. And in the heart of that still, living flame a little glow of red began to quiver.

Through the trembling air shrilled a second sound. From the corner of her eye Jirel could see that a dark figure had moved forward into the circle and fallen to its knees at the sorceress' side. She knew it for Giraud. Like two blades the notes quivered in the utter hush that lay upon the assembly, and in the globe that red glow deepened.

One by one, other voices joined the chorus, queer, uncanny sounds some of them, from throats not shaped for speech. No two voices blended. The chorus was one of single, unrelated notes. And as each voice struck the globe, the fire burned more crimson, until its still pallor had flushed wholly into red. High above the rest soared Jarisme's knife-keen fluting. She lifted her arms higher, and the voices rose in answer. She lowered them, and the blade-like music swooped down an almost visible arc to a lower key. Jirel felt that she could all but see the notes spearing straight from each singer into the vast sphere that dwarfed them all. There was no melody in it, but a sharply definite pattern as alien and unmistakable as the symmetry of their grouping in the room. And as Jarisme's arms rose, lifting the voices higher, the flame burned more deeply red, and paled again as the voices fell.

Three times that stately, violet-robed figure gestured with lifted arms, and three times the living flame deepened and paled. Then Jarisme's voice soared in a high, triumphant cry and she whirled with spread arms, facing the company. In one caught breath, all voices ceased. Silence fell upon them like a blow. Jarisme was no longer priestess, but goddess, as she fronted them in that dead stillness with exultant face and blazing eyes. And in one motion they bowed before her as corn bows under wind. Alien things, shapeless monsters, faceless, eyeless, unrecognizable creatures from unknowable dimensions, abased themselves to the crystal floor before the splendor of light in Jarisme's eyes. For a moment of utter silence the tableau held. Then the sorceress' arms fell.

RIPPLINGLY the company rose. Beyond Jarisme the vast globe had paled again into that living, quiet flame of golden pallor. Immense, brooding, alive, it loomed up above them. Into the strained stillness Jarisme's low voice broke. She was speaking in Jirel's native tongue, but the air, as she went on, quivered thickly with something like waves of sound that were pitched for other organs than human ears. Every word that left her lips made another wave through the thickened air. The assembly shimmered before Jirel's eyes in that broken clarity as a meadow quivers under heat waves.

"Worshippers of the Light," said Jarisme sweetly, "be welcomed from your far dwellings into the presence of the Flame. We who serve it have called you to the worship, but before you return, another sort of ceremony is to be held, which we have felt will interest you all. For we have called it truly the simplest and subtlest and most terrible of all punishments for a human creature.

"It is our purpose to attempt a reversal of this woman's physical and mental self in such a way as to cause her body to become rigidly motionless while her mind — her soul — looks eternally backward along the path it has traveled. You who are human, or have known humanity, will understand what deadly torture that can be. For no human creature, by the laws that govern it, can have led a life whose intimate review is anything but pain. To be frozen into eternal reflections, reviewing all the futility and pain of life, all the pain that thoughtless or intentional acts have caused others, all the spreading consequences of every act —that, to a human being, would be the most dreadful of all torments."

In the silence that fell as her voice ceased, Giraud laid a hand on Jarisme's arm. Jirel saw terror in his eyes.

"Remember," he uttered, "remember, for those who tamper with their known destiny a more fearful thing may come than——"

Jarisme shrugged off the restraining hand impatiently. She turned to Jirel.

"Know, earthling," she said in a queerly strained voice, "that in the books of the future it is written that Jarisme the Sorceress must die at the hands of the one human creature who defies her thrice—and that human creature a woman. Twice I have been weak, and spared you. Once in the forest, once on the roof-top, you cast your puny defiance in my face, and I stayed *my* hand for fear of what is written. But the third time shall not come. Though you are my appointed slayer, you shall not slay. With my own magic I break Fate's sequence, now, and we shall see!"

In the blaze of her purple eyes Jirel saw that the moment had come. She braced herself, fingers closing about the fragment of crystal in her hand uncertainly as she hesitated, wondering if the time had come for the breaking of her talisman at the sorceress' feet. She hesitated too long, though her waiting was only a split second in duration. For Jarisme's magic was more supremely simple than Jirel could have guessed. The sorceress turned a blazing purple gaze upon her and sharply snapped her plump fingers in the earthwoman's face.

At the sound Jirel's whole world turned inside out about her. It was the sheerest physical agony. Everything vanished as that terrible shift took place. She felt her own body being jerked inexplicably around in a reversal like nothing that any living creature could ever have experienced before. It was a backward-facing in a direction which could have had no existence until that instant. She felt the newness in the second before sight came to her—a breathless, soundless, new-born *now* in which she was the first dweller, created simultaneously with the new plane of being. Then sight broke upon her consciousness.

THE thing spread out before her was so stupendous that she would have screamed if she had possessed an animate body. All life was open to her gaze. The sight was too immeasurable for her to grasp it fully—too vast for her human consciousness to look upon at all save in flashing shutter-glimpses without relation or significance. Motion and immobility

existed simultaneously in the thing before her. Endless activity shuttling to and fro —yet the whole vast panorama was frozen in a timeless calm through which a mighty pattern ran whose very immensity was enough to strike terror into her soul. Threaded through it the backward trail of her own life stretched. As she gazed upon it such floods of conflicting emotion washed over her that she could not see anything clearly, but she was fiercely insisting to her inner consciousness that she would not—*would not*—look back, dared not, could not—and all the while her sight was running past days and weeks along the path which led inexorably toward the one scene she could not bear to think of.

Very remotely, as her conscious sight retraced the backward way, she was aware of overlapping planes of existence in the stretch of limitless activity before her. Shapes other than human, scenes that had no meaning to her, quivered and shifted and boiled with changing lives—yet lay motionless in the mighty pattern. She scarcely heeded them. For her, of all that panoramic impossibility one scene alone had meaning—the one scene toward which her sight was racing now, do what she would to stop it—the one scene that she knew she could never bear to see again.

Yet when her sight reached that place the pain did not begin at once. She gazed almost calmly upon that little interval of darkness and flaring light, the glare of torches shining upon a girl's bent red head and on a man's long body sprawled motionless upon flagstones. In the deepest stillness she stared. She felt no urge to look farther, on beyond the scene into the past. This was the climax, the center of all her life—this torch-lit moment on the flagstones. Vividly she was back again in the past, felt the hardness of the cold flags against her knees, and the numbness of her heart as she stared down into a dead man's face. Timelessly she dwelt upon that long-ago heartbreak, and within her something swelled unbearably.

That something was a mounting emotion too great to have name, too complexly blending agony and grief and hatred and love—and rebellion; so strong that all the rest of the stupendous thing before her was blotted out in the gathering storm of what seethed in her innermost consciousness. She was aware of nothing but that overwhelming emotion. And it was boiling into one great unbearable explosion of violence in which rage took precedence over all. Rage at life for permitting such pain to be. Rage at Jarisme for forcing her into memory. Such rage that everything shook before it, and melted and ran together in a heat of rebellion, and—something snapped. The panorama reeled and shivered and collapsed into the dark of semi-oblivion.

Through the clouds of her half-consciousness the agony of change stabbed at her. Half understanding, she welcomed it, though the piercing anguish of that reversal was so strong it dragged her out of her daze again and wrung her anew in the grinding pain of that change which defied all natural laws. In heedless impatience she waited for the torture to pass. Exultation was welling up in her, for she knew that her own violence had melted the spell by which Jarisme held her. She knew what she must do when she stood free again, and conscious power flowed intoxicatingly through her.

She opened her eyes. She was standing rigidly before the great fire-quickened globe. The amazing company was grouped around her intently, and Jarisme, facing her, had taken one angry, incredulous step forward as she saw her own

spell break. Upon that tableau Jirel's hot yellow eyes opened, and she laughed in grim exultation and swung up her arm. Violet light glinted upon crystal.

In the instant Jarisme saw what she intended, convulsive terror wiped all other expression from her face. A cry of mingled inarticulatenesses thundered up from the transfixed crowd. Giraud started forward from among them, frantic hands clawing out toward her.

"No, no!" shrieked Jarisme. "Wait!"

It was too late. The crystal dashed itself from Jirel's down-swinging arm, the light in it blazing. With a splintering crash it struck the floor at the sorceress' sandaled feet and flew into shining fragments.

For an instant nothing happened. Jirel held her breath, waiting. Giraud had flung himself flat on the shining floor, reaching out for her in a last desperate effort. His hands had flown out to seize her, and found only her ankles. He clung to them now with a paralyzed grip, his face hidden between his arms. Jarisme cowered motionless, arms clasped about her head as if she were trying to hide. The motley throng of watchers was rigid in fatalistic quiet. In tense silence they waited.

Then in the great globe above them the pale flame flickered. Jarisme's gaspingly caught breath sounded loud in the utter quiet. Again the flame shook. And again. Then abruptly it went out. Darkness stunned them for a moment; then a low muttering roar rumbled up out of the stillness, louder and deeper and stronger until it pressed unbearably upon Jirel's ears and her head was one great aching surge of sound. Above that roar a sharply crackling noise broke, and the crystal walls of the room trembled, reeled dizzily—split open in long jagged rents through which the violet day poured in thin fingers of light. Overhead the shattering sound of falling walls roared loud. Jarisme's magic tower was crumbling all around them. Through the long, shivering cracks in the walls the pale violet day poured more strongly, serene in the chaos.

In that clear light Jirel saw a motion among the throng. Jarisme had risen to her full height. She saw the sleek black head go up in an odd, defiant, desperate poise, and above the soul-shaking tumult she heard the sorceress' voice scream,

"Urda! Urda-sla!"

In the midst of the roar of the falling walls for the briefest instant a deathly silence dropped. And out of that silence, like an answer to the sorceress' cry, came a Noise, an indescribable, intolerable loudness like the crack of cyclopean thunder. And suddenly in the sky above them, visible through the crumbling crystal walls, a long black wedge opened. It was like a strip of darkest midnight splitting the violet day, a midnight through which stars shone unbearably near, unbearably bright.

Jirel stared up in dumb surprize at that streak of starry night cleaving the daylit sky. Jarisme stood rigid, arms outstretched, defiantly fronting the thunderous dark whose apex was drawing nearer and nearer, driving downward like a vast celestial spear. She did not flinch as it reached toward the tower. Jirel saw the darkness sweep forward like a racing shadow. Then it was upon them, and the earth shuddered under her feet, and from very far away she heard Jarisme scream.

When consciousness returned to her, she sat up painfully and stared around. She lay upon green grass, bruised and aching, but unharmed. The violet day was serene and unbroken once more.

The purple peaks had vanished. No longer was she high among mountains. Instead, the green meadow where she had first seen Jarisme's tower stretched about her. In its dissolution it must have returned to its original site, flashing back along the magical ways it had traveled as the sorceress' magic was broken. For the tower too was gone. A little distance away she saw a heap of marble blocks outlining a rough circle, where that white shaft had risen. But the stones were weathered and cracked like the old, old stones of an ancient ruin.

She had been staring at this for many minutes, trying to focus her bewildered mind upon its significance, before the sound of groaning which had been going on for some time impressed itself on her brain. She turned. A little way off, Giraud lay in a tangle of torn black robes. Of Jarisme and the rest she saw no sign. Painfully she got to her feet and staggered to the wizard, turning him over with a disdainful toe. He opened his eyes and stared at her with a cloudy gaze into which recognition and realization slowly crept.

"Are you hurt?" she demanded.

He pulled himself to a sitting position and flexed his limbs experimentally. Finally he shook his head, more in answer to his own investigation than to her query, and got slowly to his feet. Jirel's eyes sought the weapon at his hip.

"I am going to kill you now," she said calmly. "Draw your sword, wizard."

The little dull eyes flashed up to her face. He stared. Whatever he saw in the yellow gaze must have satisfied him that she meant what she said, but he did not draw, nor did he fall back. A tight little smile drew his mouth askew, and he lifted his black-robed arms. Jirel saw them rise, and her gaze followed the gesture automatically. Up they went, up. And then in the queerest fashion she lost all control of her own eyes, so that they followed some invisible upward line which drew her on and on skyward until she was rigidly staring at a fixed point of invisibility at the spot where the lines of Giraud's arms would have crossed, were they extended to a measureless distance. Somehow she actually saw that point, and could not look away. Gripped in the magic of those lifted arms, she stood rigid, not even realizing what had happened, unable even to think in the moveless magic of Giraud.

His little mocking chuckle reached her from immeasurably far away.

"Kill me?" he was laughing thickly. "Kill me, Giraud? Why, it was you who saved me, Joiry! Why else should I have clung to your ankles so tightly? For I knew that when the Light died, the only one who could hope to live would be the one who slew it—nor was that a certainty, either. But I took the risk, and well I did, or I would be with Jarisme now in the outer dark whence she called up her no-god of the void to save her from oblivion. I warned her what would happen if she tampered with Fate. And I would rather—yes, much rather—be here, in this pleasant violet land which I shall rule alone now. Thanks to you, Joiry! Kill me, eh? I think not!"

That thick, mocking chuckle reached her remotely, penetrated her magic-stilled mind. It echoed round and round there, for a long while, before she realized what it meant. But at last she remembered, and her mind woke a little from its inertia, and such anger swept over her that its heat was an actual pain. Giraud, the runaway sorcerer, laughing at Joiry! Holding Jirel of Joiry in his spell! Mocking her! Blindly she wrenched at the bonds of magic, blindly urged her body forward. She could see nothing but that

non-existent point where the lifted arms would have crossed, in measureless distances, but she felt the dagger-hilt in her hand, and she lunged forward through invisibility, and did not even know when the blade sank home.

Sight returned to her then in a stunning flood. She rubbed dazed eyes and shook herself and stared round the green meadow in the violet day uncomprehendingly, for her mind was not yet fully awake. Not until she looked down did she remember.

Giraud lay there. The black robes were furled like wings over his quiet body, but red in a thick flood was spreading on the grass, and from the tangled garments her dagger-hilt stood up. Jirel stared down at him, emotionless, her whole body still almost asleep from the power of the dead man's magic. She could not even feel triumph. She pulled the blade free automatically and wiped it on his robes. Then she sat down beside the body and rested her head in her hands, forcing herself to awaken.

After a long while she looked up again, the old hot light rising in her eyes, life flushing back into her face once more. Shaking off the last shreds of the spell, she got to her feet, sheathing the dagger. About her the violet-misted meadows were very still. No living creature moved anywhere in sight. The trees were motionless in the unstirring air. And beyond the ruins of the marble tower she saw the opening in the woods out of which her path had come, very long ago.

Jirel squared her shoulders and turned her back upon her vow fulfilled, and without a backward glance set off across the grass toward the tree-hid ruins which held the gate to home.

There Is a Might

By ELMA DEAN

There is a kind of melancholy might
That shapes my days
With dark precision—shadows all the pleasant ways
Of flesh impermanent as candle-light. . . .
I have no freedom from this shade
I cannot rightly name—or fear to name! I've made
Vain-glorious talk and pompous rime
Against a certain time . . .
And I have laid
High plans while far discordant laughter blared
Like trumpets rather felt than heard. I've dared
The thing to strike! But I'm afraid. . . .

Satan in Exile

By ARTHUR WILLIAM BERNAL

A stupendous weird novel of a space bandit whose exploits among the planets of our solar system made him a veritable Robin Hood of the airways

The Story Thus Far

PRINCE TORGENY, a handsome young nobleman of the terrestrial court and later to become known as Prince Satan, an interplanetary corsair, is doomed to exile on the prison planet, Triton, by his ruthless enemy, High Prince Fane, Overlord of Earth. With him is sent a beloved comrade, Feloth the Wise, an aged scientist who has been blinded in a laboratory explosion.

The prison ship *Oila,* which carries Torgeny and Feloth toward their destination near far-distant Neptune, is manned by a crew of low-caste Martians —towering red giants of simple nature and tremendous strength—sold as slaves to the captain of the ship, Stully, a bestial Earthman.

In a vain effort to save the Martian Waugh from Stully's drunken wrath, Torgeny's handsome face is permanently disfigured by a brutal lashing. Torgeny vows vengeance, and when the *Oila* nears her dismal terminus, he persuades the giant slaves to free him of his shackles and leads an attack against Stully and his cohorts. In the ensuing battle, Torgeny's left arm is seared into uselessness by a blast from a ray-gun. By chance, the Martian Waugh saves Torgeny's party and sends Stully and his men to death in the absolute zero of the interplanetary void.

Torgeny, crippled and scarred, and blind Feloth, now find themselves in full possession of the *Oila,* manned by a crew of tireless, kindly Martians. They know they will be hunted down by the efficient space police as soon as their ship fails to arrive at Triton, but for the present they are free.

And Torgeny has not forgotten the day he vowed that were he ever to regain his freedom, Overlord Fane would pay full measure for his treacheries.

The story continues:

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5. The Blot Among the Stars

ON THE day when Waugh so strangely delivered him not only from death but from the far greater cruelty of long imprisonment as well, Torgeny the exile found but two desires paramount in his mind. One was the desire to rid himself of the dead left arm dangling so uselessly from the charred spot where Stully had cauterized bone and muscle with his heat beam. The other was to make the *Oila* a means of removing himself from the ken of man.

An iron will, clenched teeth, and the exile's own ray-gun had solved his first problem. His second problem also found answer, though not in the way he had expected.

As he sent the *Oila* cometing swiftly sunward under his deft touch, Torgeny did not dream that his ultimate destina-

"On the radio vision-screen they saw Threepa bellow his challenge into space."

tion would be determined for him by an intelligence other than his own—an intelligence so bafflingly incomprehensible to mere human minds as to have almost no common ground with them.

It was during the twelfth day of the long flight inward that the initial warping of the *Oila* occurred, while Torgeny and Feloth were still lamely eliminating the number of possible refuges from the charted planetoids in the ship's map room.

"Don't you see, Feloth?" Torgeny was saying despairingly. "We've got to find a place with breathable air before we get in as far as even the outermost of the asteroids. Our tanks are almost exhausted already, even though we're traveling on half-ration. There's only one way out for us. We've got to find a hiding-place

which has its own atmosphere and do it within——"

It was then that the first staggering manifestation occurred. Torgeny had been staring unseeingly out one of the thick glasteel ports, as he talked. Suddenly his words trailed off into nothingness. All at once the universe had disappeared!

Torgeny sprang to his feet, pressing a frowning face tight against the icy pane. He rubbed his eyes, stared again. It was true. One second the boundless void was ablaze with brilliant star blotches; then abruptly there was nothing out there but vacant blackness. Blackness, empty, complete—and that was all. A ship alone in free space more than a million miles from the closest speck of matter. Yet suddenly the universe was blotted out as totally as though the *Oila* had slipped behind a cosmic screen of deepest ebony. It was uncanny. It was impossible. Yet it was true!

"Great Dzchan!" The oath ripped from the Earthman's taut lips like a bolt from his ray-gun. Whirling from the jet circle of the window, he flung himself past the startled Feloth, heading for the control cabin. Even as he moved, the stale-smelling corridors without resounded with the ear-splitting clang of alarm gongs. From above came frightened patterings of spongy feet as the frantic crew sped frenziedly to their posts. Mad confusion swarmed through the ship, and the thunder of sound rang through Torgeny's head like the crash of battle.

The Earthman thrust himself through the open hatchway and was dashing for the ladderway, when the furious clamor of the alarm gongs and the hurried padding of racing feet ceased shuddering in his ears with that same incredible abruptness that had blotted the stars from human sight.

Then the next instant, as the speeding *Oila* became blanketed in a silence greater than that of the airless abyss around her, as the surge of jangling metal cries of a ship in danger were stilled with an instantaneousness that was unimaginable, the sickening warping movement began to make itself felt.

Of a sudden, as he stood perplexed in the soundless passageway of the prison ship, Torgeny felt the ponderous metal floor-plates buckle uneasily beneath his feet, and the whole ship quivered and seemed momentarily to writhe like a living thing. In the same fleeting moment, Torgeny's head swam in whirling, dimensionless chaos. Every organ in his tortured body seemed to swell and grow beneath an inexplicable shower of pulsating energy and his vision twisted sickeningly, became distorted, blurred — as though his staring eyes had been suddenly jerked out of focus by a physical wrenching of the very light that reached them.

A fleeting instant of this horrible bending and bulging and warping, accompanied by a soul-twisting swirl of nausea intensified almost beyond human endurance; then all was as before. One dizzy second while the universe vanished into blankness, while all sound seemed swallowed as by the hungry void itself, while the whole of creation seemed striving vigorously to turn itself completely inside out—one vertiginous second of cosmic deformity—then the horrible distortion fled swiftly away.

Once again the thud of flying feet provided a staccato background for the harsh clang of alarm gongs and once again—uncanny miracle! — Torgeny could see, through the glasteel disk ahead, the boundless void stippled with glaring star-flecks. Whatever it was, the terrifying experience was over. . . .

BREATHLESS, bewildered, astounded, Torgeny and his crew gave a thorough search to the *Oila* and the abyss around her for explanation of the inexplicable event which had just occurred. But though it was agreed by all that they had suffered a common experience, a common nausea and a common terror, there was none who could so much as hint at any sort of explanation. They were faced by something hitherto beyond the pale of human experience.

There was not much time for futile speculation on the nature of the cosmic warping through which the *Oila* had just passed, however, for another matter of greater importance soon shocked through the minds of the little crew of fugitives. For the crew was still chattering in guttural awe over what they had just experienced, when a new thunderbolt smashed home among them, in the form of a shrill bellow from the decks above.

"Master! *Master!*" It was Tina's voice, horror-twisted, panic-laden. "Master! The ship—we are off course!"

Bounding through the midst of the booming, jabbering crew, Torgeny hurled himself up the metal ladder to the upper deck and raced for the control room.

"Tina—where's Gloh?" bit out Torgeny as he pushed a wide-eyed plainsman from the panel board and scanned the dials thereon. "Where's Gloh? I stationed him here to watch controls, even though they were locked already. Go find that red devil and bring him to me!"

FELOTH entered just as the one-armed exile finished jabbing at the studs and while he was preparing to set the automatic lock on them.

"Feloth," the crippled man snapped, "what do you suppose is going on here? First the whole universe disappears, then everybody aboard goes stone deaf and the whole ship shudders under some infernal sky-wrench. Now, the man I left stationed here to watch the trajectory charts has changed the controls and deserted his post. We're over twenty points off our course and .32768 further off the ecliptic than we should be. I——"

"Master!" Tina was back again, more wild-eyed than before, his huge barrel chest pumping from exertion and terror. "Master! Nobody see Gloh! Gloh, he's go! Vanish!"

"Vanished?" Torgeny's jet eyes were terrible as they glared from his scarred face, grim and wrathful. "Gloh's disappeared—hidden on a little ship like this? Are you mad, you idiot? Go bring——"

"But, master," pleaded the giant redman, "you come—you find—you see. Gloh—*nobja!*—gone!"

Cursing with vitriolic heat, Torgeny stamped out of the control cabin, followed discreetly by the Martian and the blind sage, determined to unearth the missing observer immediately.

But Gloh was really *nobja*. The desert man—paradoxically as it seemed—*had* disappeared from the midst of the little group of refugees. Gloh had been on duty in the control cabin. The door had remained open during all his spell; no one had seen him leave his post. He was there a moment before that eery warping seized the ship and threw the entire crew into blind frenzy. Then in the ensuing confusion, he had vanished completely.

"Where is he? Where could he go?" demanded Torgeny when the futile search was over. "Is it suicide? Did he open the airlock——"

"Master, Gloh is back! Master!"

"By the Code!" swore Torgeny and dashed once more for the control room. "Have we all gone raving mad? A grown man can't just fade from sight on

a ship in free space! What does this all mean?"

Gloh, perplexed and dazed, was waiting in the control cabin. Even in the face of Torgeny's withering reprimands the rubbery-hided man stoutly maintained that he had obeyed orders, had been sitting in the control chair every instant of his three-hour spell. He had not seen Tina when the latter came to relieve him; he had not seen Torgeny when he came to reset the controls; most of all, he had felt nothing of the eery "warping episode"; had not even heard the insistent clamor of the alarm gongs. Yet he had the effrontery to protest that he had not slept for a single instant. Torgeny, his brain grappling foggily with a dozen problems, could only stare at him, aghast.

Although he was loth to do so, Torgeny ordered Gloh thrown in irons on a rather forlorn suspicion that he might be up to some incomprehensible trickery. Gloh trotted morosely after his jailer without resistance. Torgeny watched in thoughtful silence, the livid scar across his face twisting his puzzled frown into a mask, grim and hideous.

"Now," said Torgeny at length, "I'm going to make one more search—scour the ship this time—to find out what this is all about. Either the lot of us is going space-mad—or else something sinister is behind this. Feloth, come with me. Tina, and you Rued, you stay here—keep an eye on those controls. I've set them just the way I want them—watch them, but leave them untouched. And stay awake!"

With difficulty the one-armed man donned a weapon-belt, loosening the ugly ray-gun in its holster. He sent one flashing look about the tiny cabin before he left, then took Feloth by the hand to lead him away. "Sound all gongs at the slightest sign of trouble. When I come back, I want to find the pair of you right where I'm leaving you—on the job! Understand?"

TINA and Rued stared dubiously at the retreating back of their master, then at each other, and lastly around the cabin. Tina sighed and muttered a Martian prayer under his breath; Rued glanced at the control chair and shivered, despite the oppressive closeness of the room.

Torgeny and Feloth had no sooner reached the narrow prow of the *Oila* than once again—while Torgeny's lips were in the very act of uttering a word—that dreadful pall of silence descended like a physical blanket upon the rocketing cruiser. A moment later, before Torgeny had recovered from his stupor of surprize long enough to make for a glasteel observation port, there came again that sickening lurch from tortured floor-plates, and that moment of horrible, stomach-churning vertigo.

The pair of Earthmen reeled giddily for a moment; then the nasty sensation ebbed away. A second later, sound returned to their ears with a dull roar. Half a minute afterward, every Martian who was not on duty about the ship was huddled in a chattering heap about the two pale men.

"Feloth," said Torgeny in low tones which belied his tight-lipped expression, "we know there can't be anything out there—the sky's clear—so whatever is doing this is aboard the *Oila* herself. And we're going to find it right now!"

But Feloth and Torgeny, followed by the remainder of the frightened crew, made the complete rounds of the prison ship without success. They searched her from keel to tower, from stem to stern, and found absolutely nothing out of the ordinary. They even went so far as to

open all cargo chests to examine them for some mysterious machine, but outside of a small leaden box of rare protactinium—a highly radio-active metal much in demand at Triton's gruesome human cancer laboratory — the *Oila's* cargo was typically commonplace.

Exhausted by the strain imposed upon him during the past few hours, Torgeny wearily clambered back up the ladder to the control room. On the threshold of the little cabin he stopped short.

Tina and Rued were both gone.

Torgeny swore. Jet eyes sought the seeing-charts, then leapt like drilling heat beams to the control panel to sweep the numerous dials on its face.

"My son," said Feloth, quietly, "what is——"

"Feloth, we're off our course again!" Torgeny's single hand leapt over the keyboard and rectified the error. For the third time that day, he slammed on the locking mechanism. "Feloth, the controls have been tampered with again—and Tina and Rued have both disappeared!"

"Disappeared?"

"Yes! Gone with that warping—as Gloh went! Gone, just as though it had jerked them clean into some other dimension!"

He had no way of knowing, then, just how accurate his explanation was!

Babbling in fright, the crew of terror-stricken redmen swarmed into the cabin and milled about. Torgeny, tried almost to the breaking-point by the succession of impossible happenings, flared at them wrathfully, ordered them out. There were a few moments of confusion as the Earthman, in his mad desire to clear the room, flailed savagely at the thick-hided space sailors; then, as the cabin emptied, there came unexpectedly:

"Shall we go too, master?" *And foremost among those in the passageway stood Tina and Rued!*

"Tina! Rued!" roared Torgeny, unable any longer to contain himself. "Where have you been? Where did you come from? Answer!"

But like Gloh, even in the face of Torgeny's scathing accusations, Tina and Rued meekly insisted that they had been in the control room all the time, that neither they nor anyone else had laid a finger on the controls, that they had not felt any second warping of the ship, and that they had certainly not been the least bit sleepy.

It ended in an order for Gloh's release, and an announcement that henceforth the *Oila* would be under direct manual control. He, Torgeny, would take the first spell. All others except Feloth were to remain in quarters till needed. They would be given a full explanation of everything in the morning.

WITH fear filling his veins with ice for the first time in all his existence, Torgeny settled himself at the controls of the *Oila*. Nervously he urged the lean craft sunward, constantly on the alert for the slightest deviation from either her plotted course or the ecliptic.

There was another sinister aspect to the affair that he alone was aware of, a significant fact that he did not wish any but old Feloth to hear. Even when they two were quite alone within their isolated little control cabin, he spoke of it only in a tense whisper. The superstitious Martians were bad enough now, knowing only what they did; but what would they do were they to learn that after each time the controls were tampered with, Torgeny had found the *Oila* heading in precisely the same direction — almost at right angles to her present course? Chance alone would hardly have caused

the controls to become fixed in identically the same fashion twice in succession. Nor was this all. That particular point in space toward which the *Oila* had twice been headed by some unknown hand was just below that far-distant constellation known as the Pleiades—and at present there was absolutely nothing off toward the Pleiades but billions of miles of empty, open void. A ship headed in that direction was destined — horrible thought!—to leave the solar system behind her for ever.

Minutes dragged slowly by in the heavy stillness which followed that first short, terrible conversation. Torgeny stared watchfully at his seeing-charts, every nerve alert; Feloth sat in brooding thought. Neither man could say for certain just how long they had sat thus, when all at once the rude clangor of excited gongs shattered the oppressive silence like the crash of thunder. Feloth leapt to his feet.

"Torgeny!"

"It's all right, Feloth, I sounded the alarm myself."

"But, Torgeny, what's the matter?"

"We're off our course again. The control studs are all dead. Something's gone bad in the stoke room."

Alarm! Feet rushing about the ship, voices raised in terrified cries. *Alarm!* The banging of cabin doors and the slamming of strident gongs sounding warnings. *Alarm!*

Jurth, mumbling through thick lips that terror had well-nigh paralyzed, reported from the engine room.

"Jurth," snapped Torgeny into his microphone, "what's the matter down there? Cease stoking at once. The studs are locked and we're away off course—getting farther off all the time!"

But nothing was wrong down in the engine room. The stoking-crew ceased feeding power-units to the throbbing motors of the hurtling ship, yet her speed only increased. Torgeny, punching desperately at the emergency controls, was horrified to find that the *Oila* had long ago exceeded her topmost velocity and was still accelerating evenly.

Ebon eyes, staring from beneath a brow beaded with sweat, looked up from the banked control studs in despair. Dry lips quivered, struggled vainly to utter some word. For seconds, while thick silence hung over the ship like a cloud, Torgeny was a motionless figure of stone. No one in the control room noticed that the gongs had stopped their deafening clatter. No one noticed anything except that the jet eyes of Torgeny were glazed with the greatest horror man can know.

Then abruptly, as cold beads began to trickle down along the livid slash across his grim countenance, the one-armed Earthman thawed into frenzied energy. One lurching spring carried him to the ship's radio; he worked frantically over it as he roared commands to the roomful of chattering plainsmen from Mars. Yet even as he gave the commands, he felt that human effort to save the ship would be in vain.

"Stations, all of you. Waugh! Tina! Get out the inspection tools! Rued! Order all oxygen units down to .4—point four, do you hear? Feloth! Feloth—for Dzchan's sake, help me!"

Action! The *Oila* was a seethe of racing men, and her thin, stale air resounded with guttural boomings of the bewildered crew.

Then, almost as if in response to Feloth's unspoken queries, Torgeny's voice—cold, clear, but aquiver with suppressed dread—called repeatedly into the sending-disk of his powerful transmitter a succinct explanation of what had actually happened.

"S. O. S. *Oila* calling Mars— S. O. S. *Oila* calling Mars. *Oila* at 13.4736 degrees U. E., sector lgv, Band Nine, is heading directly along Pleiades line with locked controls. Oxygen tubes going dry —traveling at full acceleration toward open space. S. O. S. *Oila* calling Mars——"

Toward open space with the controls locked! Death was claiming the *Oila* for his own.

Tense, silent, fearful, the crew of refugees, huddling within their tiny capsule of metal, watched their life-giving sun dwindle slowly into smallness across untold miles of fathomless void. When it became apparent that the controls of the *Oila* were mechanically perfect—as Torgeny somehow feared they would be —it could no longer be doubted that an alien something was responsible for the ship's doom. The controls were perfect; the *Oila* simply did not respond to them. Helplessly, mysteriously, she was being *purposely* drawn toward the far-away Pleiades—and toward eternity.

It was not until the last possible minute that Torgeny abandoned the futile radio distress signal, and even after the *Oila's* calls stopped, the crew waited, with gradually waning hope, for the appearance of a rescue party on the maddeningly blank rearward screens.

No help came.

THE long hours dragged slowly into days of endless length, while still the *Oila* sped into the maw of infinity. In their turn, the endless days went like lethargic eons as the runaway craft pursued her monotonous journey. On, on, steadily, deliberately, infinitely. On, on—whither?

Always Torgeny stared into his pitiless seeing-charts, but he could not forget that it was nothing but the waiting, waiting, waiting in the midst of a bridgeless gulf that had brought madness upon the earliest voyagers into space.

And was not dull, listless madness seeping like poison into the sluggish bloodstreams of the *Oila's* crew, creeping through their very veins to still their pounding hearts? Only Torgeny himself seemed to retain control of his faculties, kept his nerves attuned to some semblance of activity. Only he had any interest in the progress of the *Oila* through the greatest of all vacuums; only he still desired to learn the inexplicable why and wherefore.

And so it was Torgeny the one-armed who discovered that the *Oila* was not traveling under any detectable power at all, but was being drawn onward with ever-mounting velocity by a means unrecordable to the instruments of man. And it was he, also, who first sighted that vague and monstrous Shadow which writhed its far-flung coils across the heavens to blot out the star veils that lay ahead—who sighted the vast *thing* toward which the *Oila* sped with the unerring directness of a bullet to its goal.

For quite some time there had seemed to be a tiny dead spot on the seeing-charts directly on a line with the prow of the speeding vessel. Gradually, as mile after markless mile slid by, the spot became more certain to the watchful, puzzled eyes; and quite as gradually it grew upon his consciousness—like a thought imbedded in his mind from without—that the *Oila's* incredible pilgrimage would lead her no farther than that selfsame blot of inky stuff awhirl among the stars. Whether that idea was a product of the Earthman's own intuition or whether it was but another manifestation of that amazing alien something itself, he was never quite certain; nevertheless Torgeny knew for days ahead that the coil-

ing Shadow which floated weightless between his ship and the Pleiades was to be his destination.

Imminence to that vast and shapeless mass of jet—which by its pulsings and its writhings seemed vigorously alive—brought terror once more crashing through the lassitude of the *Oila's* crew and stirred them again into life. Like men struggling to the surface of a pool, the handful of doomed men fought their way back into thinking, feeling, fearing beings. But they could not even conjecture as to the nature of the blot across the sky.

"What is this thing ahead, Feloth?" asked Torgeny after he had described the appearance of the ebon cloud-coils to his sage companion.

The aged Feloth, freed of the shackles of lethargic despair by having a tangible problem to face and solve, ran his thin fingers thoughtfully through his heavy mane of white before he answered.

"Torgeny," he replied at last, hesitatingly, "have you ever heard of the Venusian space-monster—Zthroe? I hardly thought you had; it is one of those unwritten, little-known legends told around swampland campfires by the elder priestmen of long ago. Racial myths were once a hobby of mine, else I myself would never have run across this particular tale. However, although it seems fantastically ridiculous, the legend does fit this case with suspicious accuracy.

"Once in that time before men, as all ancient Venusian legends begin, the skies were filled with gods. But finally when the slime in the dark pool of Life-to-Be commenced to stir itself in its efforts to beget the seeds of humankind, there came a great change in the heavens around the sun. Up to this time Venus had been the home of Zthroe—a monstrous Shadow of titanic size which held all the planet in its restless coils. But when the primordial pool of life sent forth its seeds, there came the Change, a cosmic shifting and thundering and warping over all the universe. Vast inter-dimensional writhings that were to wrench at least one world to shattered asteroidal fragments—to fire the sun with a great, mysterious energy from a plane beyond the material—to end by giving birth to life, in the sense that we know it, on the solar worlds.

"When this mighty wrenching of dimensional space—this tremendous convulsion of the super-cosmos—occurred, conditions altered so much that the huge and alien entity, Zthroe, could no longer dwell adjacent to any of the masses of whirling rock and boiling water which even the inner planets were at this time. You see, Zthroe being a non-material entity—a creature of several entirely different planes and dimensions—was of a life-form utterly foreign to that which was developing into the seeds of animal and plant life of today. Zthroe, the formless, inter-dimensional being—a sentient creature with mental abilities so great as to be god-like—was of an order of life which depended on a complex metallic compound, just as our life hinges upon a carbonic structure. So, as I have said, when the supernal cataclysm that was to build up a new order of things came about, a chemical change took place throughout all *three*-dimensional matter which, while highly favorable to carbonic life, was obnoxious to the metallic protoplasm of Zthroe, the inter-dimensional being. Since this was so, either by a most fortunate accident or the wonderful design of an all-seeing Providence, deathless Zthroe was driven from his anchorage of spinning three-dimensional matter, and had to abandon the solar system altogether, leaving it in full control of the newborn carbonic life. Since that day, Zthroe,

never deigning to approach any but metallic three-dimensional matter, has dwelt in eternal exile—in this dimension if not in others—far, far out in open, empty void, away from all contaminating material substance.

"Now, impossible as it sounds, Zthroe, that gigantic, shapeless mass of jet life-stuff, coiling part in one plane and part in a dozen others, immortal, supernally powerful and intellectually god-like, does correspond in appearance with the mighty blot of ebon shadow which you say lies ahead of us. If this be the case, Zthroe's age-old, mystical science—far, far surpassing anything we have yet dreamed of—could account for the eery events of the past month. It could account for the inexplicable warpings and bucklings of the *Oila* which resulted in temporarily removing several of our crew from mortal existence. It also offers a solution to the problem of how, though our oxygen cylinders have long been empty, we still have had breathable air—a miracle at least half explainable by the theory of some super-scientific leakage of the oxygen element from one dimensional plane to another. And, at least, this would not be the first fantastic legend of a primitive people to have its foundation in actual——"

"But, Feloth," exclaimed Torgeny in amazement, "even admitting your solution, what could this Zthroe creature possibly want of us? If this immortal denizen of a zero-temperatured vacuum is so powerful and so utterly alien to——"

"I was wondering about that, too," Feloth broke in quietly. "Suppose, Torgeny, Zthroe *is* immortal—does that indicate in any way that it does not require sustenance? Isn't it conceivable that Zthroe might have been feeding in some incomprehensible dimension for many millenniums, until now, just by chance, it happens to find itself in need of food while this part of its limitless coils—the head, shall we say?—happens to be protruding into our particular plane?"

"Do you mean that it wants us—for *food?*"

"No. Not us exactly. But you must recall that Zthroe—whose true shape we can only guess at, since but a mere *flat* three-dimensional cross-section of it is visible to us—is of a metallic constitution and must therefore feed upon some mysterious compound of metallic elements. How incredibly great or how tremendously minute this metallic compound must be and what its nature is, we must wait to find out. And at the rate we're traveling it won't be——"

"Feloth!" gasped Torgeny. "Suppose—suppose Zthroe feeds on *iron!*"

Feloth gestured resignation. "Let us hope that Zthroe does not," he said.

Within twenty hours more the *Oila* had reached the end of her long journey, had come to rest within the cloudy yet metal-brittle coils of the deathless space-monster Zthroe—for that alone was what the huge blot in the sky could be. And though the *Oila* had been speeding at incredible velocity across the gulf of space, and though she was brought to a full stop in the clutching, vaporous-looking tendrils of the astounding entity, Zthroe, instantly and without the slightest deceleration, yet the hurtling cruiser suffered no ill effects, nor did her marveling occupants even realize their awful progress had come to an abrupt end until they made a check-up of the instrument board. The powers of Zthroe were miraculous indeed.

In horrible uncertainty, while Torgeny tried to comfort the stricken crew, the handful of humans waited to

see what strange doom would follow. Would their tiny shell of steel vanish suddenly from about them, leaving them at the cruel mercies of the void? Would one of the indescribable, unhuman Zthroe's ethereal-looking yet tremendously solid tentacles strike out suddenly—as they had gently, to draw the ship within their midst—and smash the craft into mangled wreckage? Would the throbbing, smoky feelers from Beyond seek to pry the *Oila* apart, plate by plate?

But conjecture, every man realized, was useless. How could a human brain even begin to comprehend the workings of a mind of living metal?

Then, unexpectedly, while Torgeny and his men stared out through thick glasteel ports at the weaving, shadowy mass surrounding them, at its countless tiny threads of twisting, crawling metal veins, at its heaving, flexible yet unimaginably adamant billows, there grew inside the mind of the one-armed Earthman a message. Inside the deepest labyrinths of his brain the soundless voice of Zthroe made utterance—an immortal creature of unknown dimensions, unhuman and baffling description in mortal phraseology, struck through the nebulous confines of a dozen different dimensional planes to converse with the mind of a human being!

Within the innermost core of Torgeny's brain there unfolded a definite message. He did not see pictured thoughts, or hear a spoken word, but rather his mind seemed to recall vague sensations as though he were half remembering some long unthought-of dream. Only, by some uncanny method, by Zthroe's magic, the Earthman was remembering things he had never before known.

Like flickering shadows cast by some weaving, mystic flame, the dim "far-off" imagery of Zthroe's communication blossomed eerily inside Torgeny's brain, without his ever seeing an actual picture or hearing a single word. It was rather by some heretofore inactive, unawakened organ of the inner mind now stimulated for the first time that he sensed what Zthroe would have him understand.

Due perhaps to unimaginable difficulties, involving supernal phenomena of an inter-dimensional nature, the non-human still-whisper in Torgeny's brain was but the fleeting sensation of a moment. Still it sufficed to convey, to the human recipient, information which offered the nearest thing to an explanation of the entire weird affair that he would ever get.

The looming bulk of blackness floating without weight in the midst of the infinite abyss was in truth of that race of *things* classified by the sage Feloth as mystical Zthroe. It was a feeder on metallic compounds, being thus only to derive that energy which rendered it for ever deathless. It was at this time hungry, and in all the unguessable number of planes through which its ponderous mass extended, Torgeny's ship had been the closest, and easiest to reach, source of the desired metallic food. That food—allaying mortal fears for the steel jacket of their cruiser—was nothing short of the rare and little understood element, protactinium. Heavy protactinium, element 91, being over a hundred times more radio-active than radium itself, was the source of Zthroe's eternal energies, was the three-dimensional matter from which the space-monster's digestive organs extracted, by artificial disintegration of the element, heat—strength—life!

Having learned these amazing facts and having dazedly recovered from his state of rapport with the unknown, Torgeny muttered to the crew a few words of explanation together with an assur-

ance of good intention on behalf of Zthroe the deathless. Feloth, his nimble mind the first to grasp and digest the unbelievable bit of information, expressed a desire to be taken immediately to the cargo hold where sat the thick leaden chest containing the precious protactinium, originally destined for cancer-control experiments on distant Triton.

It was but half a minute's work to descend to the hold, but already Zthroe was preparing to feed. The dull gray of the leaden chest was glowing as though by some extremely penetrative light from within, as the party of humans gained the threshold, and in a few seconds it slowly began to bulge and then to burst open at one end. Some mysterious chemical change had already taken place within the rare metal inside, for now, instead of a solid, there wisped forth from the demolished chest a smoking coil of iridescent vapor tinged with bright colors no mortal eye could recognize. Then slowly, slowly, while the human spectators watched in breathless expectancy, that wreath of vaporized protactinium began to ooze through the airtight floor of the *Oila*—began to seep straight through the thick plates of her hull into the maw of that pulsating immortal whose interdimensional lengths lay coiled about the stranded *Oila* like columns of living, black smoke.

At last the greasy, unearthly vapor of the protactinium food was gone, with only a vague pungency in the air and a crumbling leaden chest left to show that aught had occurred aboard the captured space-vessel. But without, in the writhing, shapeless mass of dark stuff that was the three-dimensional portion of Zthroe, there crept tiny roseate glimmers, like fire-twinges, as the metal veins of the vast, incredible monster assimilated its precious nourishment. Zthroe twitched, stretched tumbling coils—and momentarily the *Oila* rocked and shuddered in its mighty grasp—then froze again in rigid suspension. Zthroe the deathless had eaten.

"And this—this thing," explained Torgeny when he had described the eery feasting of the space-monster to Feloth at some length, "this entity, in its message to me, hinted at some kind of reward—an answer to my uppermost desire, as far as I could comprehend. Well, it's gotten its nourishment from us—I hope it keeps its promise and at least returns the *Oila* to the solar system.

"Even that means another month of useless travel. Another month lost, and all this time we should have been seeking out a home somewhere for our ragged little band of outcasts. A refuge—a hiding-place where none could ever find——"

The crippled Earthman stopped short. The *Oila* had suddenly taken a slight lurch as Zthroe's billowy limbs seized her in a new grip; then abruptly her motors were drumming back into life again. Torgeny sprang to one of the ebon-clouded ports and peered out. The *Oila* was moving through space!

And then, for the last time in this weird episode, the mighty steel shell of the *Oila* seemed to quiver and wrinkle; her heavy plates buckled uneasily under the torturing strain of eery, titanic forces which far transcended all previous manifestations. The white star-gashes in the jet curtain of space had begun to emerge once more from behind the twitching, all-engulfing coils of metallic Zthroe; now they as instantly blinked out again. Lastly, Torgeny's ear-drums hummed with the almost physical pressure of that uncanny deafness he had already twice expe-

rienced. Space was warping anew, and the *Oila* was sliding into some vague world between dimensions!

For one ghastly minute Torgeny felt as though his entire digestive system were being violently churned within his body. Vertigo swirled down upon him with sightless, soundless heaviness. His tottering feet slipped from beneath him and he fell, upward and sideward—in all conceivable directions at once. . . .

The glaring stars snapped back into place with a jolt that hurt the dizzy, out-of-focus eyes that stared at them from behind a thick glasteel port. Sound—indefinite, meaningless, but with the roar of a thousand thunderclaps—drummed suddenly again upon the tortured eardrums of the *Oila's* crew.

Torgeny's glazed eyes struggled back into blurry focus with difficulty. He found himself gaping out into a light-stippled infinity that was more than familiar. He gasped, kneaded his eyes with his fists, then stared again. The flashing stars still hung in the same places, undisturbed.

Somehow, in an interval of time which couldn't have been longer than fifty seconds, the *Oila* had traversed untold millions of miles of empty void! Yes, incredible as it seemed, the familiar patterns of the star mazes attested indisputably to the fact that, though it should have taken many days, the *Oila* had been magically transported from the resting-place of Zthroe back to her own solar system. And now she was swinging easily through space, seemingly under her own power, just inside the orbit of gigantic Jupiter.

Torgeny, speechless with astonishment, his mind torn by a dozen emotions, raced to the control room and pounced upon the gleaming studs. But Zthroe had not abandoned its captive ship so soon after hurling her through unguessable dimensions across and between space. The *Oila*, though her rockets flamed at periodic intervals, did not respond to Torgeny's frantic manipulations. Instead, the slim craft sped as quietly and swiftly as a moonbeam straight toward the largest of looming Jupiter's nine satellites—the compact little world of Ganymede.

Closer, closer, sped the *Oila*. Now Ganymede's cragged and ribbed surface, covered with plant life warm from molten Jupiter's dull glow, rushed dangerously up to embrace her. The helpless humans within tensed themselves for the impending horrible crash, but it was not forthcoming. Unerringly, the speeding *Oila* darted down within the thick shadows between two bulky Ganymedean peaks. Miraculously, a barely discernible pit reached out with yawning mouth to swallow her sleek hull. Down, twisting speedily through natural but roomy tunnels, swept the *Oila* at the direction of her unknown but masterful navigator.

Abruptly, with a burst of phosphorescent light, the trim craft eased serenely to a sward-cushioned halt on the floor of a warmly radiant cavern-floor. She quivered once, then settled solidly to rest, her hot rocket tubes gradually droning into soft silence.

Torgeny stared in unbelief at the wondrously lush world that spread its inviting luxury before his widened eyes. This cavern-world—was this the gift of a grateful dimensionless space-monster? It seemed so, for all at once some vague wraith of a whisper fingered its way within the inner recesses of his brain, telling him that the all-powerful Zthroe was gone, never to return again.

Jubilantly, Torgeny called Feloth to his side; and was himself the first to swing wide the *Oila's* long-sealed doors.

And as the Earthman's dark locks were gently ruffled by the breeze that came murmuring in to greet him, and his keen dark eyes swept gratefully over the calm coolness of shadowed pool and refreshing rugged landscape of Ganymede's sheltered inner world, Torgeny breathed a sigh of thanks to the great goodness of deathless Zthroe.

Feloth filled his hungry lungs with sweet, crisp air, heavy-laden with the rich exotic perfumes of a thousand nameless plants. "I shall like our new home," he said simply.

Torgeny's gaze wandered dreamily over the exquisite natural garden around him.

"Home," he echoed softly. . . .

6. *Enter His Phantom Highness*

TORGENY stared morosely at his reflection in the glass. A pretty sight, indeed! He raised his hand, brushed the dark bangs more closely down over his forehead to his eyes. He groaned inwardly. A slender forefinger slid, zigzag, across his face, following the white scar that divided his countenance and twisted his mouth into its perpetual sardonic smile. He shuddered. Fathomless black eyes tore themselves from the mutilated face in the glass, and glanced downward to the reflection of the ugly stump that was all that remained of his left arm.

"Torgeny," he grated to the apparition in the mirror, "you're a grisly-looking creature. Now you're not only banished from your own world, but from every other inhabited planet as well. You show that face in the streets of any town and you'll set dogs to barking. Yes, Torgeny, from now on your approach will cause children to run in fright to their mother's arms. You're an outcast, Torgeny, an exile of the universe. That," he pointed at the disfigured visage in the glass, "is going to make you the loneliest person ever born. It quite removes from you the name of 'man' and substitutes the name 'horror'. Genus, horror . . . species, Torgeny!"

He spat out the words as he would a mouthful of ashes. His ebon eyes blazed like twin wells of hate. They leapt up and down, scanning his image as though they were the hissing beams of his ray-guns.

"And, Torgeny!" he shrieked, thin lips twisting back over white teeth in the snarl of a tortured thing, *"High Prince Fane did this to you! Men are responsible for this, Torgeny, men—your brothers!"*

The heavy butt of a ray-gun slammed against the tall glass, smashing it into a thousand flashing slivers. Pivoting on his heel, the raging man stalked from the room. With great strides, the exile strode toward the hangar of the *Oila*, flaming wrath overspreading his face. So absorbed was he in his paroxysm of anger that he took no notice of the shimmering forest of sun-trees through which he was passing.

Yet few mortals had ever beheld the rare and wondrous sun-trees anywhere else in the universe in such profusion as they grew here. The finding of this well-protected haven had been a marvelous stroke of good fortune. Not only was there plenty of pleasant, warm radiance from the great clumps of sun-trees—glowing like natural electric lights—in the hollow center of this tiny world, but there was also an atmosphere, which, while perhaps a trifle rare, was exhilarating and wholesome. In truth, there were but two things wrong with the place, Torgeny and Feloth had long ago agreed. The extremely slight gravity pull was at times disturbing to earthly organs, and "Home" was millions of miles distant

from Mother Earth and human companionship.

Of course, the comradeship of Waugh, Tina, and the other faithful and hard-working desert dwellers was a blessing, but there were occasions when the guttural boomings of the homely creatures was severely trying to terrestrial nerves, ragged and frayed after a long siege of back-breaking work. And work aplenty had there been to make the empty little world fit for human habitation. It had been no simple feat, for example, to transplant the many sun-trees—even though they had no real roots — into regular lines and clumps, so they would spread an even light over all the cavern. Building a house of metal and glasteel had been terrific labor, too—labor impossible without the superhuman strength and endurance of Waugh and his fellows.

It was the securing of supplies for their haven, as Torgeny had more than once pointed out to Feloth, which had started him on this business of being a space-pirate. Out of the necessary plundering for food, clothing, and other materials had been born his taste for buccaneering. Little had he dreamt, that day when the inconceivable Zthroe's gratitude had rewarded the exile with a snug little world all his own, that the future would find him a forager of the void, taking delight in looting the ornamental space-yachts of wealthy idlers under the very noses of the bewildered and blaspheming space-police.

No, the scarred man had been too busy making his new-found haven fit for civilized living to be other than happy in forgetfulness of all other things. A scarred face, a missing arm, banishment itself were difficulties, but only that and nothing more. The important thing had been that he was alive—and free.

He had rejoiced much in his newly gained freedom for those first few weeks —had been fairly happy until his initial meeting with humans in his rôle of corsair of the cosmos. It was not till then that he realized he was ghastly to look upon, for Feloth was blind, and to the dog-like Martians all pale men were more than beautiful.

The bitter anguish of that moment when the woman passenger had screamed and covered her eyes at sight of him on his first venture was graven on his mind with a stylus of fire. The agony of that moment would live long in the memory of him who had once been called Torgeny the Handsome. Often at night he woke in sweat after dreaming again the revolting pleasure he had experienced when sending that ship to her doom, as it tried to follow and ray him.

And from that time on he knew in his heart that he could never take his place among society again, even if surgeons could grow him a new limb, and give him a new face. He had burned a ship carrying passengers. Even though it had been a gesture of self-defense—he had burned a ship. He had defied the Code, and a man who defies the Code is never forgiven nor forgotten by the relentless space-police. Torgeny had branded himself an outlaw for all time to come, by that one reckless deed.

Yet not all of Torgeny's existence since his escape had been ashy memories, and black despair, and hot hatred against all humankind. He had found much solace in physical labor; in boarding space-vessels and leaving in some deserving person's hands gold—valueless to himself—which he had taken from fat leeches preying on mankind's weaknesses; in risking his worthless life to bring happiness to anonymous sufferers of every race, indiscriminately — deeds performed in

Torgeny

atonement for his other sins; in helping Feloth outfit the greatest laboratory in all of space with the spoils from a dozen scientific spatial expeditions in persuading Waugh that his immortal soul was not destined to repent on the icy space-plains outside of Martian *hana,* because his killing of Overseer Stully and his men had been purely accidental.

But now, as Torgeny stamped along between rows of gleaming trees, his soundless footfalls cushioned by a thick carpet of lush green, he was not thinking of any of these things. He was in a mood of hate against the universe, and on these occasions when his wrath flamed high, it meant trouble for someone.

Without slowing his great strides, the exile tightened his broad weapon belt another notch, and almost unconsciously whipped one of his ray-guns from its well-worn holster and examined the heavy weapon. As ever, it was fully charged and in as perfect condition as human hands could keep it.

As he neared the ship, Waugh came bounding toward him in prodigious leaps. Waugh was very happy serving this strange new master, so cruel to his own kind, yet so gentle to the plainsmen who worked for him. Even now in his ire, the Earthman's granite face softened a trifle as he saw the great spongy hulk come leaping grotesquely across the meadow to meet him.

"I go too, master?" the big fellow rumbled pleadingly. "Waugh helps with good luck."

"Yes, Waugh," the voice was as gentle and unemotional as it had been in the old days in the drawing-rooms of Earth. "You and Tina and five others come with me. Tell Feloth—in his laboratory I think—to get those new coronium motors ready. We've needed a new ship for a long time, and I know just where I can get one."

Feloth

The barrel-chested Titan leapt gleefully away through the forest of shining trees to perform his errand.

A short time later the *Oila* took off in trailing incandescence, nosed her reckless way toward the secret outlet of the hollow sphere, and headed toward Mars, her fiery propulsion blast streaming along behind like the tail of a mad comet. . . .

The exile did not realize when he showed up at Home with a glistening new ship in tow, that by this latest insane exploit he had leapt from the ranks of obscurity as a nameless petty bandit of the space-lanes, into universal prominence as the most audacious corsair the annals of the space-police had ever recorded. The handsome new ship—not yet out of the yards long enough to be painted or christened—had been stolen from the Martian headquarters of those very space-police themselves.

Nor did the exile realize that he had shed the whispered name of "The Man with the Scar"

Waugh

—whispered because it meant punishment swift and terrible for those whom the Man heard say it—and gained the sobriquet of "Prince Satan, Lord of the Great Blackness."

The name was born in the nimble minds of the radio-reporters on the morning after Torgeny's astounding robbery, and for twenty hours the ether waves of three planets buzzed with information, mainly fictitious, about his phantom-like highness.

When the report of the *Oila's* sham activities drew the attention of the space-police stationed at the Martian headquarters toward the icebound lakes of Phobos, one of the Martian moons, Torgeny had had little difficulty in making full use of his ancient ruse.

Boldly strolling through a doorway left unguarded by the space-police in their haste to get to the suspected satellite, and to the "great riot" on Canal 37 which—strange coincidence!—had been reported at the same time, Torgeny had passed unchallenged by those few officers yet remaining in the yards. Muffled in his vast black cape he might almost have been one of themselves, so little could they see of his person. Anyway, it would be the height of absurdity to imagine a vandal of the void entering brazenly into the very stronghold of law and order!

The glistening ship itself was patrolled by a sole watchman, he whose babbled story gave basis for the baptism of the intrepid bandit as Prince Satan.

Smothered in his black cloak, and soundless in soft rubber soles, Torgeny's presence had been unknown to the old watchman until the invader had chosen to disclose himself by throwing back his ebon outer garment.

In darkness, Torgeny could be, with equal ease, totally invisible in his black wrappings or else vividly conspicuous in his flame-colored doublet and tunic—which was the real reason behind his picturesque costume. So to the watchman, it was as if Torgeny had abruptly materialized from out of thin air. One instant the sleepy fellow was drowsing over his alarm-box, alone in darkness, and the next he was confronted by a scarlet-clad figure wielding a wicked-looking ray-gun.

The watchman tried to stifle a gasp of amazement, but wisely made no effort to broadcast any alarm. Obediently he thrust his trembling hands into the air above his head, and offered neither comment nor criticism of the brigand's ensuing actions. Only when Torgeny asked him if the silvery ship were fueled for a test flight had the old man broken his meek silence to gulp quaveringly:

"Fueled to her gun'ls. But blast me if you ain't supernatural. Only the red devil hisself could materialize inside these yards 'thout being caught by a million cops! Who in space are you?"

"In space I am no one," Torgeny had returned, as he shoved the gasping Earthman from the cabin and sent him out the entrance port with a menacing wave of his ray-gun. "But here—well, maybe I *am* the devil! Now stand clear of the exhaust tubes, and don't forget to give my compliments to Inspector Drexx!"

With a roar like a clap of thunder, the splendid, shining vessel shot skyward toward the twin moons of Mars. Since it is impossible for one man to steer a space-craft successfully and feed it with power-units at the same time, Torgeny soon allowed himself to be overhauled by a suspiciously loitering ship which bore no identifying lights, and took a trio of helpers aboard the stolen cruiser. Then the vessel hurtled, screaming, through the thin atmosphere of Phobos, and swinging away from the pale

red planet beneath, headed out into open space.

Within minutes, every patrol cruiser in Band Five was hot on Torgeny's trail—the originally sought mysterious ship without lights completely lost with no regret. But the frantic concentration of the police upon their own conspicuous fleeing vessel was worse than futile. Stripped of the customary furnishings, which had not yet been installed, the sleek silver craft of the fugitive leapt like a beam of light through a blockading flotilla, and streaked with glorious madness for Home. From all parts of the Mars-Asteroid band, patrol ships converged upon the escaping brigand, but it was useless. No sooner did they sight him on their screens and attempt to head him off, ray beams flaring, than he was a thousand miles away again, zigzagging with the speed and unexpectedness of a jagged lightning flash toward the outer rim of Band Five.

When he neared the edge of the Fifth Band, a perfect wall of avenging cruisers blocked his way, but with the rash lunacy which always possessed him at such moments — why place too much value on *his* hollow mockery of a life?— the exiled Earthman careened entirely off the regular elevated space-lanes back to the ecliptic, and plunged headlong into the thick of the asteroid belt, where even the intrepid space-police dared not follow.

In vain had the pursuing fleet spread out, leapt the mass of whirling fragments of a forgotten world, and awaited Torgeny's doubtful emergence from that area of sudden death. But still the cosmic buccaneer's miraculous luck held good, and he cleared the no-man's-land of infinity unscathed and rocketed safely away across Band Six, his lethal beams spurting through the blackness, to burn a molten path through the heart of a surprized and helpless border patrol squadron before he could be stopped or even delayed.

By the time Torgeny was rejoined by the much slower and more cautious *Oila,* and the pair of pirate vessels were nosing Homeward, there was not a single man among all that host scouring the void for him who had the slightest idea in which direction the triumphant bandit had vanished.

Practically single-handed, Torgeny had performed the impossible feat of invading the space-police in their Martian stronghold, stolen one of their own ships, and defied their concentrated efforts to capture him. Like a wraith he had appeared in their midst, and like a wraith he had melted into the gulf of space.

That was how Torgeny earned the title of Prince Satan, Lord of the Great Blackness. . . .

7. *A Miracle in Metal*

It was but the work of a few weeks for the clever hands of Waugh and his fellow plainsmen to rip the regulation propulsive tubes from the stolen ship and replace them with Felothian coronium units. And it was while the pack of desert-dwellers were busily installing in the sleek cruiser—now painted an unobtrusive space-black — the huge leaden coronium tanks, that old Feloth proudly presented to his confederate his supreme miracle of workmanship. It had long been Feloth's secret dream to fashion for his beloved savior a metal arm and hand, in gratitude for the latter's courageous act aboard the *Oila.* Now at last, due to the white-haired wizard's unbounded perseverance and Tina's magnifying eyes and uncannily nimble fingers, the unbelievable scientific marvel had been accomplished.

Smiling with forgivable pride, Feloth entered Torgeny's rooms one rest period, and placed on the desk before the amazed exile a limb which was the exact duplicate of a normal human elbow and forearm, except that its sinews and muscles were of finest steel instead of flesh, and its supersharp nerves were microscopic wires in lieu of human fibers.

Dubiously, Torgeny underwent the delicate operation of connecting steel nerves to fleshly ones; not that he had much fear that the most eminent surgeon of three worlds—whom he temporarily borrowed from the universe to effect the union of flesh to metal—would bungle the job, but simply because he could not comprehend the actual realization of so unheard-of a miracle.

But when he awoke after the skilful bit of surgery had been performed by the great doctor under inspiration of a carefully trained ray-gun, the pirate prince discovered that, uselessly or not, the gleaming metal limb was securely united to the stump of flesh dependent from his left shoulder. Yet even for days after the abducted medico had been returned to his own world as mysteriously and suddenly as he had vanished from it, Torgeny dared not experiment, but lay in bed with his whole left side partly paralyzed, and his silvery hand dangling loosely from its shiny wrist.

But at last the day came when he had wept with joy—the memorable day when, with clenched teeth and furrowed brow, he had strained mightily to raise the lifeless limb . . . and had succeeded! After that initial effort had come the slow flexing of the steel fingers, the clutching of an object, the independent pivoting of the wrist, and so on.

Slowly, slowly, at first, his face always beaded with perspiration at the terrible strain entailed, Torgeny had gradually assumed command of his artificial limb; had watched it mature, so to speak. And eventually the time came when he knew and felt that its steel nerves were his nerves, that this incredible machine was part of him, was in fact vastly more accurate, more reliable, more powerful than his flesh-and-blood right arm!

How he had laughed at the time when he dextrously made steel fingers thumb his nose at booming Waugh; how he had thrilled when he managed to draw, with nothing to aid the metal fingers but a pen, a circle with as much precision as he could have done with his right hand and a compass; and how he had grunted with grim satisfaction on the day when, confronted by a trio of space-marauding fools bent on plundering his own ship, he had — with the electric swiftness of his metal hand—whipped out his ray-gun and fired three deadly accurate shots before a single one of his opponents could squeeze the triggers of their already drawn weapons!

It was this last feat which had instilled in him his half-mad sense of superhuman power over normal mortals. From that day forth he had not only lived up to his reputation of being the most dangerous criminal in space, but he did his best to surpass it. Prince Satan, with his coronium-driven, and therefore lightning-fast, ship and his miraculous metal arm, held the universe at bay. Like the immortal prince of darkness for whom he was named, he was an invincible monarch in his own vast realm, the abyss of space.

None dared oppose him, least of all that very miserable body of men composing the universal space-police force, whose heretofore unbesmirched records were black with the listings of Satan's insolent exploits, all of which remained unavoidably unpunished.

That is, none dared oppose the master

pirate save two solitary individuals. One of these was Threepa, the self-styled Venusian Space-lord. The other was Inspector Nderso Drexx, of the universal space-police. . . .

8. *Satan Battles the Space-Lord*

THREEPA, an eight-foot giant from the swampland regions of Venus, and listed on every police blotter in the universe for the darkest of crimes, had long been the terror of Band Three. But until the advent of Prince Satan, the swampman's fiendish cruelties and brazen outrages had been confined mainly to that one area between the orbits of Earth and Venus.

For as long as he was able, Space-lord Threepa, surnamed the Scourge, continued his scorching, bloody way completely ignoring the growing prowess of the man with the metal arm. But with Satan's name being flung frightenedly from planet to planet almost daily, that period of supercilious disdain for Torgeny's activities was doomed to draw to a close.

Within two months after Prince Satan appeared on the scene with a glittering new left arm and a phantom ship that seemed to strike and vanish at will, Threepa the Scourge had begun dickering for Satan's services as special deputy of the Space-lord. This generous offer Torgeny deliberately disregarded, since his business was not one of vile assaults upon human decency, but rather that of an avenging demon who was whipping the universe into order by means of a flaring ray-gun.

Inside of three months, the Space-lord's magnanimity and growing concern had caused him to advance his proposition through the various stages of sublord, right-hand man, and equal partner in crime. But each succeeding offer was greeted with frigid silence on the part of Satan.

Inspector Drexx

Then had come the time when Satan, seeking the heavily guarded seeds of a rare Mercurian heat-blossom for the beauty and comfort of his subterranean Home, had crossed beyond the orbit of Earth right into the heart of Band Three, and plundered the seed transport under the very whiskers of the giant Space-lord himself.

When the Scourge arrived on the scene to claim the coveted prize, he was chagrined to find only a score or so of tiny life-shells floating frantically toward Venus, drawing behind them a blistered, battered and sagging hulk—all that remained of a once majestic space-liner.

Paying no attention whatever to the feeble radio calls for help issuing from the tiny fleet of refugees, the enraged Threepa bellowed a characteristic challenge into space.

"You, Prince Satan!" he cried lustily, his powerful radio flashing the bull roar screaming over a million miles of vacuum, completely drowning out the normal dialog on the general wave length. "This is Threepa the Scourge, calling Prince Satan. By the Seven Suns, Satan, you sneaking coward, I'm not afraid of you. I'm telling you to bring me back those seeds at once, unless

Threepa

you want me to hunt you down and burn you like the swamp-scum you are! I challenge you to defy me. I suppose you're already hiding in your rat-hole somewhere, so I'm issuing a warning never to stick out your yellow nose while I'm around, or I'll break your back with my bare hands, and use your ship for a freight barge! I'll show you who's master in the void! I'm the Space-lord, and the Great Blackness is *my* kingdom. There is no longer room for the two of us, so look out! You hear? Look out!"

Threepa's gusty bravado, partly inspired by a few great swigs of *llaka,* was a bit shaken a minute later when his loudspeaker vibrated with the gentle, mellifluous tones of Prince Satan's quiet voice.

"Threepa, attention," it called politely. "Satan, calling Threepa. I heard your challenge, Threepa, and I accept it. I shall come to you immediately. Stand clear of patrols, and send me your position by space-code, so that I may punish you without interference from the police. I warn you, Threepa, do not try to escape me, for you cannot. You brought this on yourself. Now you must account for your rashness. Do you understand, Threepa?"

Cursing violently at his ill luck, the furry swampland outlaw radioed a set of co-ordinates, in the same code he had formerly used to broadcast his offers of partnership, to Satan. Then he slyly sent out the same co-ordinates to his other pair of vessels secreted somewhere among the steamy Venusian fens.

If Prince Satan were to keep his appointment alone and at once, as Threepa knew he would, the Earthman would have to burn three ships instead of one. Three-to-one odds! Nothing much for Threepa to be alarmed about now. The giant chuckled at his own vast cleverness. It took brains to be a Space-lord!

Then, while a great fleet of scarlet and yellow search-ships roamed watchfully over that immense slice of the Great Blackness known as Band Three, hoping to bag both of the vain duelists in a single capture, Prince Satan urged his disguised police craft—now christened the *Space Waif*—at dizzying acceleration toward the secret meeting-place. He laughed softly at the staccato code signals of the space-police stuttering from his cabin speaker. As if even the justly famous search-ships could successfully comb so massive a portion of infinity for two such microscopic motes!

SATAN's streaking vessel reached the appointed sector of space first. He nodded in silent satisfaction at Threepa's choice of a dueling-field; the spot was a lonely one in an uncharted region, far from the normal lanes of space traffic. In all the diamond-studded blankness reproduced on his seeing-plates, Satan could detect no alien presence, not even the braggart Threepa's pirate ship, the *Vroola.*

The next few minutes the ebon-eyed Earthman spent in making a tour of his craft to see that all was in flawless order. Waugh tagged at his master's heels, his cavernous mouth split in a grin of anticipation. Like most red plainsmen he detested all things having any connection with the steam planet's mist-filled marshes, from the slimy tentacle-spiders which spawned there in loathsome profusion, up to the cruel and savage human beasts exiled thereto by reason of their disgusting habits and foul religious rituals.

Satan's check-up reassured him that the *Space Waif* was a perfectly conditioned fighting-hawk. He was making a final test of the ray-screens, when Tina thrust his wild-eyed countenance out of the control cabin and bawled:

"Master! Ships! Two ships—they come!"

"Two!"

With a bound, Satan reached the ladder leading to the upper deck and scaled it. *Two* ships! A clumsy trick of that slant-eyed swamp-mongrel, no doubt. But that was all right. Two ships, four ships, half a dozen—what did it matter to Satan? If he won he won, and if he lost—well, death couldn't be very much worse than this sort of a life.

Now he was at the control-room door, the metal portal clanging open as he gave it an impatient slam with his steel fist and dodged inside. Quickly he thrust the goggle-eyed Tina without and sealed the door so that he was alone in an airtight cube. Next he threw off his huge ebon cape for greater freedom, his space-black eyes stabbing like skipping ray-beams over his seeing-charts. Yes, there were the ships just emerging from invisibility to his earthly eyes, less keen than the desert man's. Two of them. One approaching from the right and one from the rear. But wait! There was a *third* dot off there to the extreme left, scarcely discernible among the white pinwheel stars.

Three ships were converging upon him simultaneously.

"Battle stations," he commanded, his barely audible words as casual as though they merely expressed a desire for a cup of tea from the galley. In the hold below, five grunting Martians sprang into tense postures in lines from fuel tanks to firing-chambers, nerves keyed to the highest pitch.

"All ready, master!" husked Waugh softly into his speaking-tube, after one brief sweep of his big eyes about the room.

In silence, the slender figure in flame scarlet stood motionless in his cabin within the hull of the *Space Waif*, watching, eagle-eyed, the approach of his enemies. For perhaps half a minute he remained thus, keen eyes fixed on his seeing-charts, a sensitive forefinger unconsciously caressing the livid scar which ran across his right cheek. If Threepa could have spied into the unobtrusively black cruiser at that moment, he would have beheld a queer smile on his adversary's face. But even he would have known that there was no mirth behind those twisting lips.

All at once Satan's gleaming left arm shot out toward the banks of control studs before him, and long steel fingers danced crazily over the many little buttons. The duel was on.

The *Space Waif* streaked through space with a velocity that brought her within beam range of one of the three approaching ships, almost before that vessel could throw on its protective screens. Satan did not waste a charge here, however, but rushed past the spot so quickly that frightened eyes could hardly locate him again on their seeing-charts.

Yet in that second it had taken him to flash past the cruiser, Satan managed to catch a glimpse of the black and white pirate insignia of Threepa the Scourge, which the ship bore on its blunt prow. It was all right to go ahead, then. The three converging craft were his challenger's, and not just some wandering tramp transports. Satan wheeled the *Space Waif* like a swooping gull, and shot back over the vessel he had so fleetingly investigated.

The Venusian ship was quite unprepared for such a display of lightning speed, which indeed easily surpassed that of any other ether-craft in the universe. The horrified underlings of the giant Space-lord heartily wished for Venus and

safety when they saw the *Space Waif* come hurtling back toward them, death beams drilling the vacuum.

At this period, due to the limited power available from their generators, all space-ships were equipped so that either their offense beams or their defense screens could be operated, but not both concurrently. During that time when a ship was sending out its heat rays, it was fully exposed to the enemy's charges; and when the protective screens were effective, the vessel, while temporarily invulnerable, was unable to make use of any offensive weapon.

So the Venusian craft Satan had chosen for his first adversary wisely chose defense in preference to attack, and like a turtle withdrawing itself into its shell, she threw out her shimmering nullifying screens and thus momentarily retired from battle.

By this time, though but seconds had elapsed, the two sister ships of the Venusian vessel had arrived upon the dueling-ground—with the flagship *Vroola* hanging somewhat cautiously in the rear. Satan, without abating his mad rush one whit, whizzed beyond his initial target and roared hotly toward the next nearest ship. The latter, in response to this abrupt maneuver, made a fatal mistake. Her commander, no doubt rattled by the unexpected onslaught, stabbed out with his lethal rays instead of wrapping himself within a screen of security. He never had time to repent his action, for the next moment Satan had scored a burn on his craft and swept by.

The angry, knifing forward ray of the *Space Waif* had eaten like a hot needle into butter through the thick hulls of the luckless Venusian cruiser straight to her engine room, as the Earthman swung beneath his antagonist. A tumultuous inferno of blinding light ballooned suddenly in the void as the stricken vessel's fuel tanks exploded soundlessly.

The *Space Waif* was instantly slanting away, but even so she shuddered from stem to stern as splashes of molten metal — fragments of the vanished ship — slapped dangerously against her outer hull. But the racing destroyer quickly righted herself without loss of speed, and spiraled safely beyond reach of the two remaining ships.

One!

SATAN licked his taut lips and veered the *Space Waif* toward open space. Aboard the *Vroola*, now shimmering in her nullifying envelope of vibrations, Space-lord Threepa gulped dryly and dashed beads of sweat from his hairy brow. The encounter was less than two minutes old, and already he had lost a ship.

But what was this? The *Space Waif* had had enough? Incredible! Yet look —she was crippled! Threepa's yellow eyes flashed triumph.

"Full speed after him!" he ordered, bellowing into his microphone; "that stinking little Earthman is like all the rest of his kind—mere bluff! But don't let him escape. Stoke up faster, do you hear? We've got to overtake him."

The *Vroola* and her sister ship leapt through emptiness in eager pursuit. The *Space Waif* was careening crazily toward civilization, her defenses quivering into flickering life intermittently as though they were gradually going dead.

"Ho, ho!" purred Threepa gleefully, his huge ears standing exultantly erect upon his shaggy head. By the Cosmos, what luck! His vicious little pale-skinned enemy was right in the palm of his grimy paw now—if only he could catch him. He shrieked for more speed.

Powerful, throbbing rocket blasts

urged the *Vroola* forward with ever-growing acceleration. The gap between her pursuers and the *Space Waif*, now leaping ahead with erratic spurts of flame, was rapidly being eliminated. In ten minutes more Threepa the Scourge would overhaul Prince Satan, and then—— The torture room of the Scourge was reported to be the most complete of any in the universe. Threepa's pointed ears twitched in anticipation, and a lean tongue greedily caressed sharp, gleaming fangs as he visualized the sport that would be his when at last Satan was delivered into his hands. Satan with his eyes stung out by winged ribbon-eels brought from Threepa's swampland home; Satan, his hands fastened to a table by long steel needles, being painted with *chika*-fluid! Satan's naked body writhing futilely under the onslaught of a half-starved swarm of tentacle-spiders.

Threepa chuckled in unholy enjoyment. Already he could almost hear the strident clicking of the rank-odored herd of rope-legged marsh things, as they fought over and feasted upon the long red strips torn, with cannibalistic zest, from the tortured body of their victim. Threepa's yellow eyes burned brighter.

"More speed!" shouted the shaggy Venusian pirate, and felt the breath squeezed from his towering body as the *Vroola* rocketed onward with renewed velocity. Almost within range now, and the *Space Waif's* faulty defense screens were blinking on and off like the twinkle of a fading star! Threepa glared at his other vessel, being left far behind in this interplanetary man-hunt. Good! He'd get all the glory of capturing Prince Satan, himself. Threepa began planning his attack. First he would split the *Space Waif* lengthwise, then beam her——

But at that moment the *Space Waif* vanished!

The amazing outcome of his sky-fight, the further adventures of Prince Satan and his battle with the space-police will be printed in next month's Weird Tales. Reserve your copy now at your news dealer's.

The Curse of the Valedi

By CAPTAIN S. P. MEEK

An eery tale of the dark powers that are said to infest the slopes of the Carpathian Mountains in Romania—a story of vivid action and many thrills

DUSK came on rapidly after the sun sank behind the Carpathian Mountains. A long-drawn-out wolf howl sounded in the evening air. The driver of the diligence crossed himself, his lips muttering in prayer. Egide, my borzoi, growled softly, the hair along her spine bristling. The priest, my only traveling companion, sat in the far corner of the vehicle, telling his beads with monotonous regularity.

"Are we close to Reczankof, Father?" I asked.

He came to with a start, making the sign of the cross in the air with his finger.

"Aye," he replied in his halting French, which was our only common language. "We are close, and even closer to the fires of hell. An hour will find us in one—or the other."

He shuddered as the howl of a wolf sounded again, and clicked his beads with feverish intensity. I longed to shake him. Earlier in the day Father Paul had talked freely enough—until he learned that I was going to Valedi Castle. Then he had looked at me strangely and lapsed into silence, muttering to himself in Romanian. His few remarks had been vague and enigmatic.

The wolf howled again—closer—and Egide growled in answer. The driver crossed himself again and flogged his tired horses. The diligence lurched drunkenly along the rough, deep-rutted road.

"Are the wolves dangerous around here?" I asked.

The old priest's voice came through the gloom with almost a spectral quality.

"The works of evil are never idle, but the grace of God is everywhere. *Benedicite nomine sanctissime.*"

The driver gave a hoarse shout of fear. I stared out, then shrank back into the corner of the diligence. From the dense woods at the edge of the road, two burning red eyes, glowing with a lurid flame, were watching us. They stared for a moment, and then a wolf howl rose, only a few yards away. A low growl came from Egide's throat.

The horses squealed in terror and broke into a run, threatening to overturn the clumsy vehicle. The eyes kept opposite us despite the best efforts of the horses.

The priest pressed forward. A crucifix was in his hand, raised and extended toward the eyes. A torrent of Latin poured from his lips.

The eyes moved closer, suddenly paused, then retreated slowly. The diligence rounded a turn in the road, and the eyes disappeared.

"Reczankof!" cried the driver in relief, pointing to lights which twinkled a mile ahead. The priest sank back into his seat.

"We are safe," he said quietly. "Here no evil thing may come."

A shiver ran up my spine. I had seen wolves, lots of them, and heard them howl, but this was different. There was something of an ancient evil in those eyes, and in that blood-curdling howl.

"The gray disappeared, and a white form loomed up through the darkness."

"What was it, Father?" I asked.

But the priest had sunk again into preoccupation, telling his beads and muttering his never-ending prayers. I sat back and gave myself up to thought.

Could those eyes have anything to do with the telegram which had summoned me into the Romanian Carpathians? I thought of my light-hearted classmate at Bordeaux, Boris Valedi. It was not like him to be frightened; yet that telegram had breathed fear—mortal fear.

He had often told me of his ancestral castle, which he had not seen since his father's death years before, and of his uncle and cousin who lived there. It was wild country, he told me, with excellent hunting, and that summer we had planned to visit it. I had lingered in Bukharest while he had gone ahead. Then came that frantic telegram, a summons I had obeyed instantly.

Boris was right about the country. It had been getting steadily wilder ever

since I had left the train at dawn and entrusted myself to the primitive vehicle which went for a stage. I devoutly hoped that Boris had received my wire and would meet me at Reczankof.

I was doomed to disappointment. Only the innkeeper and a dozen roughly dressed peasants greeted us in the inn yard. As Father Paul appeared, he became the center of an excited circle. He spoke solemnly and there was a general crossing of themselves among the crowd, and low murmurs of fear.

The innkeeper pointed questioningly at me. As the priest explained, I heard the word "Valedi" often repeated.

"How far is it to Valedi Castle?" I asked in French.

There was silence until Father Paul answered. Evidently, he alone understood French.

"An hour's drive," he said.

"Then I'll go on tonight," I said. I didn't like the looks of that inn. Neither did Egide, who pressed close to my side. Besides, if Boris needed me, I had no time to lose.

There was silence when the priest translated my speech. He turned back to me.

"In the morning, one will guide you," he said, "but tonight none will stir from the village."

"Why not?" I demanded angrily.

"They fear the evil things that hunt by night when the moon is full," he answered, and turned away.

And that was all I could get out of him. I raged and insisted, but to no avail. Then the thought of those red eyes came to me, and my insistence became weaker. I resigned myself to wait until morning, and ordered supper.

I ate in solitary state at the table, Egide at my knee. The group of peasants watched me eat, casting curious, half-frightened glances at me from time to time. There was silence in the room, and when Egide yawned audibly, they started and crossed themselves, muttering in their beards. I looked around for Father Paul, but he had vanished.

When I finished my meal, I signified by gesture that I was ready to retire. The innkeeper hesitated, then crossed himself, took up a candle and led the way. Egide followed, nor did I reprove her. I was more than willing that she share my room that night.

My room was up under the eaves, with windows facing the road. The innkeeper set down the candle and left quickly, with no backward glance. I started to make ready for bed.

From the forest came the distant howling of wolves. Then suddenly, from not more than a mile away, came an unusually penetrating howl. Egide growled savagely in answer. Shivers ran up my spine as I remembered those weird red eyes along the road.

I wondered at Boris' failure to meet me, but the explanation was simple enough. I had followed my wire closely, and probably the diligence was carrying it. If so, it would not arrive at Valedi Castle until morning. Satisfied with that explanation, I threw myself on the bed.

Sleep proved hard to come at. The distant howling of wolves continued, and at intervals came that peculiarly penetrating howl which always elicited a savage growl from Egide. I rose and stared long and earnestly at the forest, half expecting to see those red eyes glowering at me through the darkness. At last tired nature asserted herself, and I slept.

The inn presented a different picture in the bright sun of early morning. It had appeared wild and sinister by torchlight the night before, but now it showed as a picturesque little place, lo-

cated in a valley between towering mountains of undoubted majesty.

The innkeeper greeted me cordially. I was momentarily taken aback by his change of attitude, but I realized that the darkness must have affected him as well as me. I smiled cheerily and indicated my readiness for breakfast.

While it was being prepared, I asked for Father Paul. The innkeeper comprehended my gestures and waved his hand toward the forest in a wide arc, evidently telling me that the priest had gone about his parochial duties. However, he had not neglected me, for after breakfast a guide appeared with horses, including a pack-horse on which my bags and gun-cases were strapped.

A few miles from Reczankof we turned into a side road through the forest. For half an hour we rode silently; then my guide reined in his horse.

"Valedi," he said, pointing.

Two miles ahead, set on a towering crag which overlooked the surrounding country, was a massive pile of rock. Even in its semi-ruinous condition, which was more apparent than real as I found when we approached closer, Valedi Castle was impressive. In the Middle Ages, doubtless it had been the stronghold of a robber baron, but now an air of desolation clung to it, as though it were a place men shunned.

My guide was palpably nervous. He crossed himself repeatedly, and but for the gold-piece I showed him, I think he would have returned to Reczankof and left me to find my own way. However, his nervousness did not affect me, nor Egide, who trotted along at my horse's heels.

We climbed the last steep approach and rode through the gate into the castle courtyard. A tall, florid-faced, heavily built man in the prime of life came forward to meet me.

"Monsieur Harrison?" he asked.

I admitted my identity as I dismounted. He advanced to meet me, but before our hands touched, there was an interruption. With a deep, low-throated growl, Egide sprang. The stranger leaped back, and I roared at the borzoi. She turned in midair and struck the man with her shoulder, almost knocking him down. I dashed in and caught her by the scruff of her neck, then looked up. Instinctively, I almost released her.

The man was crouching in an animal-like attitude, his lips drawn back in a snarl and his strange white teeth gleaming through his jet-black beard. In his eyes was a lurid flame, like that in those eyes I had seen the night before. As he realized that I was watching him, he straightened up. His eyes were instantly veiled and his mouth straightened.

"Your dog is vicious," he said.

"She seems to be," I answered apologetically. "Down, Egide!"

The borzoi slunk down at my heels. The stranger came forward again with outstretched hand.

"I am Count Dmitri Valedi, lord of this poor castle and a few hundred barren acres of woods," he said smilingly. "It is a pleasure to welcome you. My nephew will be desolated that he failed to meet you, but when I received your message a few hours ago, I sent my servant to summon him. May I act as host in his absence?"

His polished courtesy overcame the repugnance I had felt at Egide's attack and his reaction to it. My hand met his warmly, and then I gazed curiously. On the third finger of his left hand was a band of massive gold set with a green stone, on which was engraved the Valedi crest, a wolf's head. I had seen that ring, or a similar one, on my classmate's finger. His eye followed the direction of my glance.

"My ring?" he smiled. "It would serve as an introduction were other means lacking. Every male Valedi wears a replica of it. It is the ring of our ancestor who first carved out our heritage here, over a thousand years ago."

"Yes, I have seen one like it," I admitted. "Is Boris far distant?"

"No," he replied pleasantly. "He will return before nightfall. Let me take your luggage."

The peasant had unstrapped my bags from his horse while we were talking, and the Count picked them up. Several of them were heavy, but he swung them up as though they weighed nothing, and led the way into the castle.

"The house of Valedi has fallen on evil days," he said as we passed through the nearly empty outer rooms. "We afford but a single servant. The rest of the revenues go for Boris' education. Pray pardon the poor hospitality I can offer."

I hastened to reassure him as he led me to a comfortably furnished room on the second floor.

"I hope you will be comfortable," he said; "you and your dog who still doesn't seem to like me. I will leave you now to unpack. I will be below when you have finished."

He bowed and turned away. Egide gave a wicked snarl as he went out. I scolded her sharply, although it was not in my heart to blame her overmuch. There *was* something repellent about the Count, despite his polished courtesy.

I felt no desire for more of his company at once, and I spent several hours unpacking my bags and uncasing my guns. It was nearly noon before I descended.

I FOUND no one, and with Egide at my heels, I strolled out into the courtyard. Footsteps sounded from within the castle. I turned and stared blankly.

I knew that Boris had a cousin, but I was not prepared for the vision of beauty which confronted me. But even as my eyes took in her perfect features and her glossy hair, they were arrested by her expression. It was one of fear—haunting fear mixed with a great and overwhelming sadness. It was the face of one who sees a horrible doom approaching, yet is powerless to interfere with the action of fate.

"I beg your pardon," I began awkwardly, but she had no time for politeness.

"I am Valeska, Boris' cousin," she said breathlessly. "I came to warn you. You are in deadly peril of your life—and of your soul. Flee—flee while there is time."

"But what—I don't understand," I stammered.

"Don't argue," she cried passionately. "Flee at once—now—if you value your immortal soul. You must go!" she cried, stamping her foot.

"But I can't, you know," I said inanely. "Boris sent for me——"

"Boris——"

The speech froze on her lips as a deep-throated growl came from Egide. I grasped her by her collar before I turned to see the Count smiling at us.

"My daughter, Valeska," he said.

"Yes," I said glibly. "I was telling her of—Paris."

"She is interested, doubtless," he said. "She has never left this wilderness, but when Boris' education is completed, I hope to send her to Paris for a season. Valeska, is lunch ready?"

She nodded silently and entered the castle. The Count looked after her with a pitying expression.

"A sad case," he murmured.

"What do you mean?"

He tapped his head significantly.

"Paranoia," he explained. "She fancies there is a plot to kill her. If she speaks

to you of it, humor her. Denial may drive her into a frenzy. But our lunch is ready."

It was a curious meal. Valeska, poor child, ate almost nothing, nor did she speak twenty words during the meal. Nor was my appetite good, despite the bracing mountain air. But the Count ate enormously, and as I noticed, made his meal entirely of meat, of which there were four kinds on the table. He kept up a running fire of talk. He was a brilliant conversationalist, and there were few subjects on which he could not express an opinion, and an authoritative one.

When we had satisfied our hunger, he turned to me.

"If you are rested, Monsieur Harrison," he said, "we might walk down the road and meet my nephew. He should be returning soon."

Valeska raised her head to speak, but her eye caught her uncle's and the words were never uttered. She rose and left the table, followed by a pitying glance from the Count.

"Would the idea please you?" he asked.

"Immensely," I replied.

"I notice you have guns with you," he went on. "I would suggest that you take a rifle. Wolves are numerous here, and you may get a shot, even in the daytime."

For a moment I was tempted to question him, but thought better of it. Instead I went to my room and donned hunting-clothes, choosing my heaviest rifle. As an afterthought, I added to my weapons a hunting-knife, thrusting it into my belt under my coat. It was a peculiar knife with a long, heavy, curved blade. I had picked it up at an auction in Bordeaux. It was an *arthame*, an old "magical knife," alleged to have belonged to Albertus Magnus himself. Be that as it may, it was of excellent steel and its weight made it a formidable weapon.

The Count was waiting for me in the courtyard.

"Aren't you carrying a gun?" I asked.

"No," he smiled. "That is the guest's privilege. One weapon is sufficient to bag any game we see. Ah, here is my daughter."

Valeska had appeared in the castle doorway. The expression of fear had gone from her face, and she approached smiling, with outstretched hand.

"I wish you a pleasant walk," she said.

I bowed over her hand, suppressing a start as I felt a bit of folded paper in it. I brought it away in my own hand without the Count noticing, and thrust it into my pocket.

"If you are ready, we will start," the Count said. "Are you a good walker, Monsieur Harrison?"

"Fair," I answered.

"Then, instead of taking the road, we will go through the forest to a peak which has an unexampled view. From there we can see miles of the road. We will see Boris coming, and judge where to intercept him."

I made no demur, but followed, Egide, who still evinced a strong inclination to attack the Count, at my heels.

It was a beautiful walk through the forest. The Count regulated his gait to my ability, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The trip to the peak was longer than I had anticipated, but the view was well worth the climb. The castle lay below us, and from it the road ribboned away toward distant Reczankof.

The Count stared long and earnestly.

"Boris is not in sight," he said. "There is no hurry, and you are fatigued with your climb. Let us rest."

We sat on convenient boulders, and the Count began to talk. I think I mentioned that he was a brilliant talker, but that afternoon he outdid himself. I lost

track of time, so engrossed was I, and it gave me a start when I realized that it was late in the afternoon. The peak was still bathed in brilliant sunshine, but the lower valleys were heavy with shadows.

The Count stared again at the road.

"Boris comes," he announced.

Miles away I could see moving specks on the road, which might have been horsemen, but at that distance and in the semi-gloom over the road I could not be certain.

"He will not arrive until after nightfall," the Count said, "so we will meet him at the castle. Shall we start homeward?"

We rose and started down the slope.

"Keep your gun ready," the Count suggested. "We may see game at any moment."

For a mile or more we proceeded cautiously, my rifle in readiness. A thicket of dense undergrowth rose in our path.

"Go to the left," the Count said. "I will take the other side and head anything toward you."

I agreed and we separated. In a few hundred yards, the thicket came to an end. I looked around, expecting to see the Count approaching, but there was no sign of him. I settled myself to wait. After fifteen minutes, I became uneasy.

"Count Valedi!" I called.

There was no answer but the echo of my voice.

Again I called without response. Suddenly I knew the reason. The Count had, for some unknown reason, lured me into the forest, and deliberately abandoned me. Then I thought of the paper which Valeska had thrust into my hand as I left the castle. It was still in my pocket, but in the rapidly deepening darkness, I could hardly read it. I searched my pockets and found the tiny flashlight I habitually carried in my hunting-coat. The battery was still good, and on the paper I read a single word in French. "Beware!" Timely indeed had the warning been when it was given to me, but useless now.

However, there was no use in crying over spilt milk. The problem now was to reach the castle, to find Boris, and learn what danger threatened him. Luckily I have a good sense of direction, and I had Egide to depend on. Between us we ought to be able to find our way, at least to the road.

"Home, Egide!" I said sharply.

She sniffed the air, then set off in the direction whither my own instinct told me the castle lay. Fortunately the full moon would rise soon, and we would have light of a sort.

For an hour we forged forward. The gloom became intense and I had trouble threading my way through the dense forest. But Egide never hesitated. Suddenly I gave an exclamation of thankfulness. The moon showed through the trees.

We came to a little park-like glade I remembered crossing not far from the castle. We had kept the road, I decided as I stepped into it. But hardly had I entered the open space when there came a sound that made my heart skip a beat. It was the long-drawn-out howl of a wolf, from close at hand. I hastily slipped the safety off my rifle.

Again came the howl, appreciably closer, and the shivers ran up my spine. There was a weird, unearthly quality in the cry that taught me the innermost meaning of the word fear. Nor was Egide exempt from the same emotion. She crouched at my feet, the hair along her spine rigid.

Again came the weird howl, from only a short distance away. I swung my rifle toward the spot. And then it came! I almost dropped my rifle. Low to the ground were those same red eyes, glowing with a lurid flame, that I had seen

the night before. The animal paused a moment, uttering low whines of eagerness, then charged.

I stood motionless, paralyzed with fear of I knew not what. A dimly seen gray shape moved silently across the glade toward me. When it was only a few feet away, Egide charged.

With a deep growl, she flung herself toward the skulking form which half rose to meet her attack. I could hear vicious jaws snap, and then the two beasts rolled on the ground, locked together in desperate battle.

The conflict recalled me to myself. I remembered the rifle in my hands and rushed to Egide's aid. I bent over the struggling heap, looking for a chance to use my weapon. Suddenly it came. Egide rolled undermost, and for a moment the wolf was plainly visible in the moonlight.

It took me only an instant to throw up my rifle and fire. The beasts did not move, and I am certain that my aim was true, but as I shot a sharp whimper came from Egide. I had missed my quarry and struck her.

I dared not fire again. Instead I drew the heavy knife from my belt and bent over the combatants, waiting for a chance to plant the blow which would end the battle.

Again the wolf rolled uppermost. I drove the knife at its hairy throat. As the blade flashed in the moonlight, the wolf dodged away and flung up one paw, as if to protect its head. The knife struck bone. A terrific howl of pain came from the wolf. It tore loose from Egide's grip and rolled back. I moved forward to strike again, but the wolf scrambled to its feet and was gone, Egide in swift pursuit.

"Egide!" I shouted. "Egide! Come here!"

There was a sound of renewed battle in the woods, and I dashed toward it, calling again and again to the borzoi. At last her training triumphed over her hatred for her hereditary enemies. She came to me, carrying something in her mouth. I took the trophy from her, then dropped it with a cry of horror. It was a human hand!

I found my flashlight and examined it. One glance told me to whom it belonged, for on the third finger gleamed the ring I had seen that morning on Count Valedi's hand.

A sudden feeling of contrition shot through me. I had felt bitter toward the Count for forsaking me, but in view of the horrible fate that had overtaken him, my rancor vanished. Probably he had only meant to joke with me—and I had the only weapon. I must find his body if possible.

EGIDE led me into the forest for a quarter of a mile, then came to a halt before a heap on the ground, and howled mournfully. A stench of death and corruption hung heavy on the air.

Flashlight in hand, I bent over the torn remains of what had been a man. Horror and sorrow nearly overcame me. I recognized the form. It was Boris Valedi, the man I had come to aid. There was no mistaking his bloated, half-eaten features. A scar I knew well still showed on his cheek, and on his dead finger gleamed the ring of the Valedis, the wolf crest showing banefully in the light.

A sudden thought struck me. With Boris and the Count dead, Valeska was alone in the castle. It was thither I must hurry.

"Come, Egide," I said sharply. "Home."

My eagerness communicated itself to the borzoi, and she dashed off without hesitation. I stumbled along after her in the deceiving moonlight. Luckily in two hundred yards the wood thinned, and we

were on the road. I turned to the right and ran toward the castle.

We were nearer than I had supposed, for the castle loomed up ahead of us surprizingly soon. I called Egide to my side and approached slowly, cautiously. For some reason, I was not so eager as I had been a short time before.

I crept into the courtyard, my hand on Egide's neck. A white form rose from the darkness and came to meet me.

"Thanks be to the good God," came Valeska's voice. "He returned furious, wounded, and I knew you had worsted him."

"What——" I began but she interrupted.

"Don't stop to talk. Take these." She thrust a pair of old-fashioned dueling-pistols into my hand. "They are loaded with bullets of virgin silver, the one kind that will avail. Your rifle is useless against such as him."

"Boris——" I began, but once more she interrupted imperiously.

"I think I know. Don't tell me now. Seek *him* out and destroy him. You will find him in the lighted room. Stamp out the evil."

"But you——"

"Never mind me. His blood is mine, and on me will the curse descend. When you destroy him, you will destroy my soul. but that matters nothing. Go, and remember, *kill every wolf you find this night. Every one!* Only so can you make my sacrifice effective, and wipe out the curse for all time. Go, go quickly!"

An animal-like howl of rage and pain came from the castle. I hesitated no longer. I thrust one of the pistols into my pocket, and entered, the other pistol in one hand and my knife in the other. Egide, her hair bristling, followed close at my heels.

Outside the lighted room I paused, summoning my courage. With a sudden effort, I threw my weight against the door. It gave, and I staggered into the room.

A sickening stench, a horrible odor as of a wolf's den in midsummer, greeted me. In the dim light of a lantern stood the Count, naked. His body was smeared with blood and dirt, and marks of savage teeth showed on his neck. He was binding up his left hand.

He looked up as I entered, and I felt a sudden weakness. In his eyes glowed the same lurid flame that had marked those of the wolf which had attacked me. I had time to notice no more before Egide launched herself across the room at his throat.

An expression of fear crossed the Count's face. He paused only long enough to catch up a dark furry strip from a chair, then bounded through the open window, Egide at his heels.

I dashed to the window. Streaking across the castle courtyard was a huge gray wolf, with Egide following. Valeska's words flashed across my mind. I raised the pistol and took hasty aim in the moonlight. The ancient weapon belched and a howl of pain from the fleeing wolf told me that my aim was good. It staggered for an instant, then went on, with Egide hot in pursuit.

I dropped the pistol, grasped the lantern and sprang through the window. Across the courtyard I ran, and out into the road. A hundred yards ahead I heard Egide's growls as he worried at something. I ran toward her. She was only a few feet off the road, worrying a prone figure. I cast the light of the lantern on it, then staggered back, a feeling of faintness gripping me. She had the body of the Count by the throat, and was systematically tearing it to pieces.

"Down, Egide!" I cried. She crouched, and I bent over the body. A deadly nausea swept over me. The Count was naked, except for a wolfskin girdle about his

middle. His throat was almost torn out by the borzoi, but the things that sickened me were two. His left hand was gone, severed as though by a blow of a heavy knife, and in his chest was a bullet wound. And I had shot at a running wolf!

I LEANED against a tree, sick and faint, but the end of the horrors of that night was not yet. Another eery wolf howl sounded, close at hand, from the direction of the castle. I turned to face the new menace.

Another wolf materialized from the darkness and launched itself at me; but it had reckoned without Egide. The badly mauled borzoi was still game, and she met the attacker chest to chest and jaw to jaw. In an instant the two animals had grappled and were rolling on the ground. Then it was that I remembered the second pistol, the one I had thrust into my pocket. I drew it and advanced cautiously.

The two animals were locked in a death grip, but in the bright moonlight it was easy to tell them apart. I leveled the pistol at the wolf's head. The distance was only a few inches, and I knew that I could not miss. A sudden expression of almost human panic came into the animal's eyes, and I hesitated. Then came the remembrance of Valeska's words: "Kill every wolf you find this night. Only so can you wipe out the curse."

I pressed the trigger. The weapon went off with a roar, and a shriek of human anguish rose on the air. The wolf shook itself free from Egide's grip and rose on its hind legs. It swayed for an instant, then toppled. As it fell, the gray disappeared, and a white form loomed up through the darkness. I held the lantern forward, and a cry of horror and unbelief burst unbidden from my lips. I had shot a struggling wolf through the head; yet before me, a bullet-hole in her forehead, lay the body of Valeska, naked except for a wolfskin girdle about her middle.

My brain reeled. With a cry of horror that rang strange and muffled in my failing hearing, I fell senseless across the corpse.

"YOU did well," Father Paul said gravely.

He had found me senseless that terrible night, brought me to Reczankof, and was nursing me. It was the fifth day after the tragedy, and the first time he had allowed me to talk.

"You did well, my son. Most of what you have told me, I knew. I would have warned you had I been allowed, but what is heard under the seal of the confessional is sacred. I knew not of the death of Boris, although I rejoice in it. Had he lived, the curse would have descended to him, to his eternal damnation.

"It was the curse of the Valedis. For centuries, there has been one werewolf in that accursed race, always the lord of the castle. On the death of Count Dmitri, Valeska, the sole remaining member of the blood, inherited the curse. She lost no time in trying to avenge her uncle.

"She has known for years the fate which awaited her, and she has prayed for death. She would have avoided it by suicide, had I not been forced to forbid her the sin of self-murder. I have hopes that she will be saved, despite the manner of her death. You tell me that she resumed the human form an instant before her soul left her body, and there was time for a repentance.

"She was the last of the Valedis. There is none to inherit either the curse or the castle. The ancient sin is at last expiated, by the grace of God. *Benedicite nomine sanctissime.*"

He crossed himself devoutly.

A Grave Is Five Feet Deep

By AALLA ZAATA

Every other night the Englishman dug the grave of a little child one inch deeper—a strange weird tale of India

"PLACE haunted?" inquired the prospective buyer of the too-anxious owner.

"No," answered Captain Colbraith, and a little gesture seemed to relinquish sappan, cassia and palm trees, white laurel, hibiscus and thickets of red geranium, the whole exquisite estate of Huiplul. The larger part of this flower garden, of great and small growth, he had brought to this place and by infinite labor, by spending a fortune, he owned one of the beauty spots of India. This man would buy it and never know of its different fringes in the spring, of its passion torches in the summer, its later avid verdure, its last whispered deflowering.

The two Englishmen stood silent a moment, gazing at the wonderful grounds, copied partly from English lands and partly from the lands of an Indian prince, the magnificence of the East mingling with the clearly defined methods of English grounds. The residence was of the red sandstone of India, as were the terraces and walks leading to it.

Meredith was not an impressionable man, but some curious thoughts struggled upward in his mind. There was some strange mystery here. A man did not spend fifteen years making a paradise to put it on the market as cheaply as had Colbraith, unless—— Without actually intending it, he said impulsively, "You could have sold it ten times over at the price you ask if there is no debarment."

After it was said he regretted it, for Colbraith's face showed strain, the strain of a man who did not sleep well, or who was recovering from fever.

Colbraith's hesitance was so slight that the other would not have noticed it but for his absorbed interest. "I have just decided to sell it; I am leaving the country in a few days, not to return. Come to the house and have a drink."

Meredith paused before entering the porte-cochère. It is almost impossible for anyone, not a cosmopolitan, to imagine such unexampled beauty as is produced here when wealth and landscape knowledge have endorsed the native land.

The residence was on an eminence, but so perfectly incorporated that it appeared almost level, and only the twelve steps at the porte-cochère asserted the fact. The driveway was half a mile in circumference and wide enough for two gigantic motors to pass. The center of this, a small lake, was so crowded with white and pink water lilies that they had to be regularly thinned. Around it were the Kashmir roses, in such loveliness and fragrance that it might have been said of them, as of Kashmir's, that they had been cultivated for forty generations. Red stone steps led down to this lake here and there, and a couple of boats idled on the water, painted the exact shade of its marvelous green. It was a nursery of dreams. Stretching away, as far as the eyes could see, were the crimson and yellow mimosas, the plumes of the tamarisk, the palms, singly and in groups, as potentates, as parliaments.

How could Colbraith give it up?—if *he* bought it no power on earth could make him relinquish it.

MEREDITH followed Colbraith into the immense hall, hung about with Eastern tapestries, carved with intricate Moorish work, furnished with the Blackwood furniture of Bombay. He would have paused here, would have greatly enjoyed handling the specimens of enamel and ivory, the marvelous damascene work of the Punjab, but a possible buyer must not be too interested.

He looked at Colbraith's back, and if backs told anything this one said he was at the end of his tether and his life was futureless. He had been drinking hard, that was certain. Meredith wondered a little. India is the home of many derelicts, of strange, unbelievable stories, only waiting for death to write the final chapter.

He recalled what he had heard about this man in Calcutta. Report had it that he was returning to England to marry some girl and that the affair—he met her in India—had been going on long before his wife's death. He had actually brought her to this place and kept her a week without his wife's knowledge! The residence was large enough. With servants with whom the fear of a master was as much instilled as the fear of their gods, it could have been managed. Then the wife died, because of his barbarity, for she would not divorce him; and now the girl refused to live in this small palace of beauty.

Frequently women came from England to obtain husbands and then insisted upon returning to England to live. How much of this was true? But what made the man look so—trapped? That was the word for it. If the unloved wife *was* dead and he was about to marry the girl he thought would recompense him—but they all thought that at first, and before the engagement was a month old——

From room to room Colbraith showed the house, saying very little, just a word or two now and then to call Meredith's attention to some bit of inlay work, a panel of hammered brass from Ahmadnagar in Tanjore, marble work, in tracery as delicate as new-budded leaves. Then Colbraith proceeded to a room which was evidently his sanctum.

Dust and cigar ashes lay thick upon tables that would have brought a huge sum in London. Torn papers, books lying open, gloves, empty wine-bottles, Eastern sashes, swords that were not for ornament, letters, pictures, many smokers' sets in brass, satinwood, ivory—the litter was not easily enumerated and would have been difficult to reduce to order. Meredith stood hesitant, for not a seat but was filled with some of this stuff.

"I never let them touch it," and Colbraith frowned at a chair that he seemed to expect would make room for his visitor. With one movement he swept it clear and motioned for Meredith to take it. "It's the one place I keep for my own," he said explanatorily.

Meredith sat down, surprized that anyone could permit such strata of disorder in a room petitioning for the best a human being could give.

Colbraith clapped his hands, and a splendid specimen of the Goorkhas made his appearance. He had brought drinks without being ordered and now put them down before Colbraith. There was green Chartreuse and brandy. Meredith chose Chartreuse, Colbraith brandy. A large glass, not the usual one, stood by the brandy-bottle and was evidently customary, also.

There was a short silence while the

men drank. When Meredith had filled the large glass again, the conversation was resumed.

"Those window mountings came from one of the palaces in the Rajput States."

"They are exquisite," murmured Meredith, and he got up to examine the work more closely. Amid a collection of hunting and fishing traps, on one of the tables, he saw a photograph, overturned, and so near the edge of the table that it just missed falling. He put out his hand to replace it, but as he touched it, it fell.

"I am sorry," he said, as he picked it up, and turned it about to replace it. It was in an enchased silver frame, made in Bikaner. But it was the face that made him pause, with his hand half-way to the table. A woman's face, not beautiful, but one so much beyond beauty in the way of sorcery—deviltry—that it held the attention as might a tragic actress at a high moment. The photograph was tinted, but one did not need to be told by the artist that black eyes and blue-black hair belonged here, that the half-scornful look was more bewitching than coquetry, that had she been painted with a dagger in her hands it could not have asserted her claim to the dagger more. There was not merely one story printed on her face, there were as many as Scheherazade knew!

He brought the photograph to Colbraith. "Will you tell me her history?" he asked.

Colbraith started violently. "Put it back!" he said in a loud voice that was beyond control. "I did not know it was there—*put it back!*"

"I am sorry." Meredith deposited the picture, face down, on the table.

Colbraith poured out a glass of brandy and drank it down so quickly that he strangled. When the coughing was over, Meredith drew his chair nearer. He felt in some sure way that the fate of the place would be decided in a few minutes.

THERE was silence for the time it took Meredith to fumble for a cigar. But he did not put it in his mouth. Some thought had come to him, stirring old stories, memories of unnatural tales. He turned frankly to Colbraith.

"I have not been in India long, but long enough to know of many curious things, where property was sold which really included a death sentence to the new owner, by plague, superstition, inhuman vows of the Indians. If you will tell me the truth about Huiplul and it is not prohibitive in this way, I will buy it."

Colbraith's expression showed his unwillingness.

"I will hold it as at the confessional."

The other hesitated, spoke quickly. "Then you shall know. The place must be sold immediately. I do not think I could remain another——"

He picked up his glass, looked in it as if expecting to find it full of liquor, then put it down.

"Five years ago I met the woman whose photograph you saw. It was in Calcutta. There are circles and circles there, socially. She was not in the first, but in a set that received Eurasians—Indian blood does not mingle with the English, and the Eurasians have the poniards of both and not a white flag between them! She was—you have seen the picture—as hot-tempered as I was, and I—I was actually proud when it was said of me that I was like the great Tippoo, who had rather live a day as a tiger than a lifetime as a sheep."

The wind ruffled softly through the open windows; then wave after wave of boisterous play began, just enough to seem to enclose the two men in complete isolation.

"We had several bitter disagreements after we were engaged. I remember once she said she had rather commit *hari-kari* than marry me. You know that song of the Uzbegs?

> I had rather the knife was my end
> Than the touch of your traitor hand;
> I had rather it severed my flesh
> At the voice of my own command!

"She quoted that to me."

Colbraith put out his hand for his glass, but Meredith shoved it just out of reach, his eyes commanding the other as he did so. "Don't mix things," he said. "Go on with your story."

"We were married with priests, flowers, blessings, all the things that could confirm—lawlessness. I have been in the East fifteen years, and in that time, perhaps, some of the evil that lies in wait for you here, as scorpions, may have augmented mine. For I do not excuse myself. As I was then I would have married her if she had been a leper—I would have fought her had she been an angel.

"We disagreed from the first. I brought her straight here. She had seen the place, and when we became acquainted I thought she wanted to marry me because of it. She knew I loved it, that India had been scraped, as far as a foreigner could scrape it, to make this place what it is. Yet that first evening, when I wanted her to have dinner in the kiosk you saw back of the lake, and we walked down there, she refused. She must have read in my face something of my attachment for Huiplul, because a look of resentment crossed her face.

" 'I believe you care more for it than you do for me!' she cried.

"I started forward, but she put up her hand as if to strike me. In a moment we both remembered, but it was as if a curtain had been rung up on a scene not yet ready for the audience. Say what I would, and I said a great deal, she would not consent to dine there. The moonlight in that place," Colbraith's reminiscent tone told his devotion as unmistakably as fallen leaves tell where their trees stand, "with the tiny fountain in the center of the table, splashing one's hands now and then, the dhaks, with their crimson flowers making the walls inside—God!

"It went from bad to worse—to the very worst. If anything is tainted, you know what heat does for it. What does it matter, say the Shiahs, if the sword fall on the flesh or the flesh on the sword? There came a time when whatever was proposed by the one was negatived by the other.

"If you are married you know something of this; if not—no devil can tell you how, between husband and wife, there can be words bitterer than the ashes of Sodom, more cruel than the rending of Zamir's wife. You do not know that Indian *kaid?* Thank whatever gods are yours, East or West, that you do not know; the eyes can bear but so much sun, the ears but so much drum-fire.

"A child was born to us in due course, a boy. I thought that would make a difference, but it only made the abyss between us wider. We quarreled over the name, and there was nothing I wished that she did not oppose. Do you know," the man's voice held that wonder that we keep for the impossibilities that still occur, "that she taught that boy to strike at me when I came near him! To call me Krishna—that Hindoo god that disported himself with thousands of gopinis, that was so notorious no Indian outcaste girl will be his wife! You know girls are married to the gods?"

Colbraith considered a moment, trying to make this thing intelligible to foreign ears.

"If it was over, my lips would be sealed, but it is not over, and that is the

reason the place has to go. We were nearly always alone here; occasionally a stray man came on business, but not often, and, of course, the isolation exaggerated the difficulties. We went out of our way to find things to quarrel about and sometimes Isabel actually manufactured them. I remember one day she said a python *reticulatus* crossed the lawn. She must have hunted that up in some history, for no woman would care to inform herself about the largest snakes in the world.

"I told her they seldom, or never, left the big forests, for they feed on deer, and live near their food. Chancing to look out of the window a little later I saw her with a stick, the size of my arm, drawing an irregular line along the sandy drive. I went out and seized her hands. She did not shrink. 'Why not?' she said deliberately, without being in the least affected by my discovery. 'We must quarrel until one or the other is dead!'

"Another time—I am telling you some of these things because I want you to know that the curse is on *me*, that it has nothing to do with a purchaser. You understand, don't you?"

The words were very insistent, and the wind, which had been stirring with little mysterious noises in the room, suddenly ceased. It was like a second question mark to Colbraith's question; it was as if it listened for Meredith's reply, wondering if he were credulous enough to answer, believe.

MEREDITH felt himself shiver, in the heavy gold of an Indian afternoon. "Of course, of course," he replied hastily, surprized at his nerves.

"Another time—you say you have lived in India just a year. That is not long enough to salaam to the East! Among certain tribes, like the Pathans, Beloochees, the cutthroats of the borderlands, ferocity is a business and the knowledge of this business can be bought, like any other commodity. And with the knowledge, the *means*."

He stopped and Meredith recalled him. It was getting late. "Another time——" he prompted.

Colbraith came back from some place that was as far away as *jahannam*. "I was trying to piece it together for you, credibly. But not Indian bred, you are not even born, say the Vaishnava sects. So—the Hindoo gods have human attributes, some good, others unspeakably vile. One branch of the Minas—they of *decoity* ill-fame—employs certain men who invoke the gods in their godless profession of the black arts. These go to further lengths than the Minas usually do; for, strange as it may seem, though these last make their living by lying and thieving they are a kindly people and actually do a great deal of charitable work.

"The Satenga, however, are ruthless. They are burned red by suns, begrimed, their dress filthy, a mass of torn cotton underneath, sheepskin coats over all, and on their never-combed heads they wear a turban called a Koola. They are like no other people in India. The Minas, occasionally employing them, actually try them when their barbarities are excessive and, on Government service once, I was at a trial. The similarity of these men impressed me—I should not know one from the Vanaprastha, the Sanyasi, the Kshatriya—they are as much alike as snakes. On more than one occasion the English Government has used them, but nothing but retribution has followed.

"Another time, to go on, I returned to Huiplul at dusk one evening and throwing my reins to a *ghorewala* was

about to enter the house, when I saw what I thought was a bit of white, not far from the corner of the house, a woman's dress. Isabel never remained out of doors when it began to dusk, she always said she was afraid.

"I turned the corner hurriedly, thinking I scarcely know what, startled a little, perhaps. No Isabel was in sight, but in the distance, nearing that bit of woods"—Colbraith pointed—"there was a man. To my astonishment I thought I recognized a Satenga. A moment later I knew I was correct, for an odor of sheepskin floated to me—they wear these coats constantly, even in the hot sun.

"I stared after him, then remembering I was unarmed called to Narapor, my *khansaman*. He did not appear at once, and by the time he got to the woods the man could have reached his destination—the final pit.

"As soon as I changed I went to Isabel. In some way I felt she knew why this man was there and it was for no good purpose. She was in the drawing-room, idly fanning, and her eyes met mine with a look of barely veiled hostility, but I thought, too, with dread.

" 'Who was that man to whom you were talking just now?' I asked.

" 'What man?'

" 'That—Satenga!'

" 'What is a Satenga?' she inquired.

" 'You may know one of these days, for he would rather kill you for that emerald on your finger than leave you to grieve for its loss.'

" 'A robber! Why didn't you——'

" 'I did and I will,' I answered, as I left the room.

"I HAD almost forgotten the incident, though, three days later. There had been some crawfish in the lake, making holes that let out the water. I had it drained, the places cemented, and was enjoying its beauty again. I had just seated myself on a sandstone bench and was wishing it had a back when I saw Isabel coming from the house. I wondered what she wanted to ask me. Such thoughts come, said Boolava, when one lives in the river and is at enmity with the crocodile.

"Half laughingly she said, 'I have been teaching Glenburn'—our boy—'some dance steps. How do you like them?'

"She lifted her dress and began some intricate movement that reminded me of the dances of the Khattaks in the Punjab. These men dance with drawn swords, slashing at imaginary enemies until they, themselves, are often covered with blood. The sunlight, flashing on her jeweled bracelets——

" '*Chale-jao!*' I exclaimed—'Go away!' And I said it in the tone one uses to a *mash'alchi*.

"But she went on, and I straightened myself to get up and make her stop when a quick breath touched me from behind, something *hurled* over my head. Swifter than thought my hands went up, pushing it away as I turned. An instant's delay would have been fatal—it was a kurong!"

"A *what?*" inquired Meredith, leaning forward, the better to gather Colbraith's evidently dreadful meaning.

"A kurong—you don't mean to say you never heard of one?"

Meredith shook his head.

Colbraith looked his incredulity. "You *have* heard of the Thugs, professional murderers? The Satengas go them one better, for they are assisted in their deviltry by the gods. India's religion has one hundred thousand hells—the Indians do nothing by a gnat's scale—and those who enter evil trades go to Rowrave, where they will be tormented by fabulous animals, called the rurus. The favorite means

by which the Satengas secure their victims is by this kurong, of which you have never heard! It is not the garotting of the Thugs, which kills at once, it is"—he took up his glass and dropped it on the floor, where it smashed to atoms, entirely unconscious of the act as he finished the sentence—"hell's death.

"It is an arrangement of something like ropes that are so connected the throat is pinioned, the arms, the legs. *One* lasso-like throw and the legs are fastened together, the arms to the sides and this hangman's rope is about the neck. But—here comes the gods' part, no doubt—it is *not* a rope, but something so slick that the individual caught in this trap is unable to hold it, though his hands can touch that part around his waist. It is supposed to be made of"—Colbraith's lowered voice told what ravellings his nerves were—"snakeskins with their guts prepared in some way to toughen and at the same time make them pliable, a catgut affair! And it adheres! If it touches the neck it is impossible to get free—my hands pushed it off before it settled there.

"Even as I turned, the Satenga was coiling something in his hands—by heaven, I see it now!—and then, like the serpent of whose breed he was, disappeared in the woods. It is only necessary to say that when a man is taken in this way his death is assured, though it may not take place for——"

Colbraith shuddered. "I could not pursue him—I might as well have tried to pursue a hyena's howl.

"Something touched my arm. 'What was it?' cried Isabel. 'Oh, what was it?'

"I had forgotten her. She stood as though terribly frightened. I suppose she was, but there was some expression in her eyes that made me say, 'How many rupees did you promise the man?'

"If she was frightened before, she was terrified now. A man *is* lord of his wife in India. I had but to go back to the house and say, 'Take my wife and bring her to the lake,' and not a *mazdur* would have remonstrated by the butt of a paper-knife. If only I had made her part of it for ever!"

Meredith stared. Was Colbraith losing his mind?

"Of course I could prove nothing, really knew nothing at that time, but now I could prove—premeditated murder! I was sure, though, she would be glad if I died. I had made my will—it's the first thing you do in India, you know—and left her everything. I began to piece things together and, at last, to hate. I proposed to her more than once that we should separate, of course thinking she would be the one to go. At the first mention of it she said she would be delighted, that she thought it strange it had not occurred to us sooner. India is so tremendous in every way, in *impossible* things, like fevers and Johar, like opium and cholera, that if one has any tie, no matter how galling, it is seldom separation is considered. Better anything than the unknown here, but I had money—there could be no question of the bare bones of life.

"Two days later she came to me—we were under that tree."

Colbraith pointed to a perfect mimosa, its frond-like branches notching the sky, its lower ones drooping shelteringly about a wide circle on which there was a small stone, very white, but as he did so his hand shook and his eyes barely touched it.

"She told me that she would be delighted to remain *here*, that I, who had proposed separation, was the one to go.

"I stared at her in utter astonishment. You know, despite all the English have accomplished there is much that never finds its way into those Blue Books—that

is concealed as a man conceals his own dishonor. A woman can not live here, away from other English people, even if she is guarded by a battalion of native soldiers. You remember when the Baroness of Duffield tried it?—that story is unequaled in the sad things of history. I think Isabel had lived long enough in India to drink these things as a fish. But she no longer cared. It was not because she wanted Huiplul, it was because she knew it was my Mecca.

"I was furiously angry. I remember I got to my feet and cursed by all the Indian gods, by Durga, by Lakshmi. And she answered me by every evil word she could think of in the East.

"You can not fathom the things that we gum over, the defilement to which one reverts here when dominated by passion. The East and its suns adopt you. You must know to what a pass Isabel and I had reached in our relations, almost incensed to the knifing process of the followers of Kapalika. You must endeavor to understand. . . .

"The following evening, just before sunset, was beautiful, like the pictures they paint of India, the sky-stained windows, the earth a green cathedral. Isabel was on the first terrace when I came out. A wide balustrade—you may not have noticed—goes around it, and on the left it is above the ground some twelve feet. I came out on that side.

"I had been drinking, but I was not drunk. Isabel said something about it and laughed. No words can tell you what her mocking laugh was, a jaguar's grimace, a hot mouthing. I threw out my right arm, without any thought except of warding off her utterances, but before it struck something she screamed. It was the boy. He had followed me, climbed on the balustrade, and my arm knocked him off violently. We rushed down the steps, but the little chap's head had fallen on a stone—he was dead."

THERE was a pause which Meredith did not break.

"Isabel was beside herself, with anger more than grief. When she was satisfied he was dead—that unmistakable look comes in a short time here—she still refused to have him buried. The physician urged her, and a high-caste Brahmin. Toward dusk, exhausted by emotion, she fell asleep.

"Doctor Heyworth came to me and explained. In spite of all we could do, other things were explaining it, too—insects. The boy's *ayah* came to me and said the words I shall not forget. 'Death can not wait.' To the fraction of a second the Hindoos know.

"They had procured a coffin. We went out in the grounds, a ghostly procession, for the dark seemed instantaneous that night, and by the light of lanterns, held aloft by the Indians, we buried him, under that mimosa." Colbraith indicated the perfect one that he had spoken of previously.

"A beautiful spot," Meredith heard himself murmur.

"I had wanted to wake Isabel, to tell her at least, but the physician would not allow it. 'It might kill her,' he said. You see he did not know, he only thought the wild extravagance of her words and behavior was owing to the shock, death. But I—I knew.

"I suppose the little procession made some noise as we returned. At all events a door opened as we neared the terrace, and Isabel appeared. The scene that followed was terrible—the only thing that matters to you, this: A week later she told me she knew I had killed my child purposefully, and that she had consulted the gods through Salsada, a great mystic.

Their decree was that I must dig his grave every other night and, each time, one inch deeper—a child's grave, *small!* Do you understand?

"I laughed sardonically. 'Why every other night? Why let me rest one night?'

" 'Because grave upon grave is not proper, say the Sri-Sampradayis. You would die too soon.'

"That evening I decided this must end, it was killing us both. But instead of my telling her, after dinner she came and told me she was going away.

" 'Our lawyers will arrange matters,' she said. 'I suppose you want a divorce as soon as one can be obtained—I do.'

"The next morning the house was filled with the noise of packing. Trunks and suit-cases were everywhere."

Colbraith rose to his feet, resting his hand upon a table by his side as if in actual need of its support.

"A grave is above five feet — sixty inches deep. Dig this every other night and each time add one more inch. Allow thirty days to the month and sum up fifteen inches to sixty at its end—God in heaven! Every other night I dig, in my sleep, but I awaken *in the grave*. I can not call. When I get out I am again asleep. One inch deeper! Now you know why I must sell Huiplul. By and by—awake—it will be impossible—to—get—out!"

Meredith was so absorbed in the story that he had forgotten the individual, and said, "And you think if you go away——"

The next instant he would have given much to have recalled the words, for Colbraith's face went as white as the dead. He reached out his hands for the brandy. Meredith handed him the bottle and as he put it to his lips he answered slowly, "It is my only chance."

Meredith might not know India, but he knew men. Before Colbraith finished the bottle Meredith silently accused him. . . . Yes, Colbraith had told the truth, the whole truth, but was it nothing but the truth?

It was some months later when Meredith, reading his mail in his library at Huilpul, saw the following obituary notice in the *Times* of London:

Regrettable Death

Captain McClaren Haines Colbraith, late of the One Hundredth Infantry, the Mooltan Regiment, Bangalore, India, died in the thirty-ninth year of his age at Dawlish, England. He had retired from the army some years ago, but lived for a time at Huilpul, in Dekanboos, where he had built a handsome residence and laid out grounds, the whole forming one of the most beautiful private residences in India.

His health failing, he returned to England, consulting the best physicians of London, but, unfortunately, without avail. His valet, William Newes, a man he had secured in London, reported that his master slept miserably, waking with distressing nightmares. These occurred with the utmost regularity every other night. The day before his death, being much depressed, he had asked his physician if a man could live without sleep.

At two o'clock in the night, the valet, hearing screams, went in his master's room to find him seemingly asleep and in convulsions. Doctor Lettell was summoned at once and every effort was made to save the life of the unfortunate man. Very peculiar features attended the case, unexplainable, contradictory.

He was asleep and yet suffering agonies of pain. Anesthetics had no effect upon him, nor was it possible to arouse him. He cried out in his torture, and the listeners once or twice distinguished the word "Isabel", which was the name of his wife from whom he was securing a divorce. At ten o'clock, the convulsions having lasted eight hours, death came to his relief.

Doctor Lettell, his physician, summoned two experts on Indian diseases to diagnose the case, as in all his medical experience he had witnessed nothing like it.

After laboratory tests it was found that Captain Colbraith's stomach contained no poison, which was at first supposed to be the cause of his strange death. The testimony of his valet showed that his master slept wretchedly, and this was confirmed by certain conditions of the body.

Summed up, the testimony of the experts was that Captain Colbraith came to his death from some unknown cause, supposed induced by his long residence in India. One other mysterious thing the physicians observed was that the fingernails of the deceased were torn, bleeding, and filled with earth, not the red earth of the countryside at Dawlish, but the heavy black earth of India.

On a Train With a Madman

By ROY TEMPLE HOUSE

A tale of stark terror, adapted from the German of Pan-Appan

"HALLUCINATIONS and illusions," said Judge Hochdoerfer thoughtfully, "in the sense of pure imaginings caused by a tight collar or an excited brain which manufactures something out of nothing, are much less frequent than most people suppose. A mirage is not something imagined, but something misplaced. No one can be certain that knowledge of the future is scientifically impossible. Even our scientists know very little as to what space and time really are. But it is certain that our faculties of apprehension are much less circumscribed than many of us suspect.

"I want to tell you of something that happened to me when I was still a young fellow in Germany. I must admit, as an item of legitimate evidence in the case, that I had been drinking, but I must testify, too, that in those days a moderate amount of liquor only sharpened my wits instead of dulling them.

"I was a recent graduate of one of the smaller German universities, and I had stopped off in the little college town for a moist and joyous reunion with old college mates. I had crawled sulkily into a third-class compartment of the train, and sat brooding listlessly at the window as the panting iron horse pulled us jerkily and noisily from the scene of my student frolics toward the scene of my dull daily labors.

"I was so absorbed in the painful business of contrasting the jovial past with the lack-luster present, that I scarcely realized that the train had stopped. Suddenly it dawned on me that I had company in my compartment, which I had thus far occupied all alone. The old fellow who had clambered with visible haste into the smallish box which is a European railway compartment, was so strange and almost uncanny in both looks and manner that he was not long in shaking me out of my meditative mood. In spite of the unusually warm weather, his coat collar was turned up around his ears, and he had pulled his broad-brimmed hat down over his face so that very little of it was visible but the tip of his nose, a long corkscrew affair which peeped out of his defensive armament like the muzzle of a cannon from a beleaguered fortress.

"Just as the train was leaving the station, I noticed that the crowd on the platform had grown agitated and excited. There were calls and cries, but as we had begun to move I could not catch a hint of what it was all about. There was fear and perplexity on many faces, as if some danger were imminent. As I leaned out of the window, I saw a row of protruding heads all along the train. Everybody was puzzled and alarmed. Back on the platform, we could see the station-master, the center of an excited group, waving his signal-flag wildly.

"Whatever it was all about, the train moved on with steadily increasing speed, and the frightened many-headed turtle drew in its heads one after another.

"At last I gave up trying to fathom the

mystery and pulled in my noodle with the others. Warm as it was, the air was pulling through the compartment uncomfortably, and I started to close the window a few inches. But the leather strap by which I was drawing it up slipped out of my hands, and the window dropped again with a bang.

"The sight of my new companion sent the cold shivers down my back. The old man had left his corner diagonally across from me and was sitting directly opposite me, his knees almost touching mine. His look and manner had changed completely. He had uncovered his face, and his head was no longer drawn down between his shoulders, but stood up like the head of a bird, on a long neck which was almost bare of flesh but was fuzzy with ragged long hairs. His face was nothing but skin, muscle and tendon, so that every change of expression, every diabolical distortion, came out in all its ghastly nakedness. The eyes were horrible. They lay so deep in their sockets that they were scarcely visible, but the savage glitter in them made me think of some beast of prey. They wandered over my person in a sort of cruel ecstasy and bored a path into my inmost being as if they were trying to penetrate every secret of my soul and set a-quiver every fiber of my nervous system.

"I STARED at this frightful caricature of a man with a sort of fascinated helplessness, while he gazed back at me with a cynical smile in which I could read his consciousness of power and his determination to torture his victim to the full. But there was something else in his gaze, a mysterious something which was not merely curiosity, something like fanaticism, like a mission and a purpose.

" 'Pardon me, sir——' as if from a great distance a squeaky eunuch-voice reached my ear. The polite phrase, however, was not spoken in a tone of courteous caution, but with an air of command. 'Pardon me, sir, if I look at you a little harder than one stranger would usually be expected to look at another.'

"I did not answer his courteous phrase. I think I should have found it impossible to speak a word at that moment.

"I tried to rise from my seat. My mind was not clear; I was only half conscious. My body was dulled and stiff. But I was tormented with an agony of apprehension. My throat was burning. My tongue felt as if it were swelling bigger and bigger and filling my mouth so full that my jaw dropped wider and wider open. I knew dimly that I was sitting like an imbecile with gaping mouth and a vacant, fixed stare. Still I said nothing. I don't think the creature was waiting for an answer or expecting one. He was just taking his time, calmly, gorgeously.

"I suppose there was an expression of surprize even in my stupid eyes, and I think my head jerked, although every muscle in my body seemed paralyzed.

" 'I am sure you have heard of me.'

"My brain was functioning after a fashion, and I was trying in vain to recall a modern bearer of the uncanny name my new acquaintance had just spoken. But the doctor went on calmly, in a moment:

" 'Yes, you have heard of me, and you know of my phenomenal cures, which have put suffering humanity deeply in my debt.'

"All at once I *did* remember the whole story. My brain seemed suddenly to awaken to something like normal activity, and I recalled what I had read in the newspaper that very morning. It had even been mentioned in our alumni group at breakfast.

"The paper had told the story of a

small-town physician who had enjoyed an excellent reputation, especially for his surgical work, but who had lived and worked till he had passed middle life without becoming known to any degree beyond the narrow field of his labors.

"His opportunity had come when a foreign potentate who was traveling through the country was stopped at the doctor's little city by an attack of illness. It was the recurrence of a hereditary disease which famous physicians all over the world had diagnosed as incurable, so that its return in an acute form would no doubt prove fatal. The ailment had come back with dangerous intensity, and His Highness' suite had already, by code telegram, prepared the responsible authorities in his home country for the eventuality of his being brought home in a serious condition, if he came home at all. Someone reported that a physician in the town was an unusually skilful surgeon, and more as a matter of humanitarian form than because anyone expected anything of him, the local sawbones was sent for. He was confident and was allowed to try his hand. Behind closed and locked doors, with all curtains drawn, His Highness was treated. No one knew anything of the diagnosis or the treatment. But the outcome was that the country surgeon cured his patient. After a week of treatment—a week during which the doctor and the royal patient were alone together, for no physician of the suite, no minister, no confidential secretary, came near the bedside—His Highness was visibly out of danger; and the medical men of the royal retinue shook their heads in apprehension and hinted at dangerous charlatanry or even at black magic. These palace M. D.'s were for the time being in complete disgrace, and His Highness had no eyes for anyone but his savior. The village doctor was made Physician in Ordinary to His Highness, with a salary beside which his modest income up to that date seemed a ridiculous pittance, and with such fame and fortune in prospect as turned his head completely.

"The fortunate outcome of his audacious experiment convinced the poor fellow that he had found the grand panacea for all human ills, the *remedium optimum* of the old alchemists, the infallible Philosopher's Stone. And it was not long till he left his brilliant court position for an insane asylum, where he planned the craziest cures for all types of human ailments, announcing proudly that there was no disease which he could not master and that he was on the way to the perfection of a treatment which would end the reign of the King of Terrors himself.

"This unfortunate maniac had escaped from his sanitarium two or three days before the day of my trip, and with the unbelievable ingenuity which frequently develops in the mentally unbalanced, he had thus far eluded his pursuers.

"And this old man shut up in the same box with me was that dangerous maniac! I had no doubt of it.

"MY MIND was working a little more freely now, and I began to plan how I might reach the bell-cord and stop the train. But I was still unable to move my limbs, and I was becoming conscious that a sweetish narcotic perfume was filling the air. I struggled against its effects, and I wondered, in my puzzled and strange condition, why I did not lose consciousness entirely. I saw everything about me, I heard every sound, I knew what was happening, even though dimly. But I could not move, I could not resist, I could not even protest by word or gesture.

" 'There is no disease,' the ghastly creature went on proudly after a long pause, 'that I can't conquer. I can heal them, I can cure them, I can floor them, I can down them, I can send them about their business every time.'

"He was growing excited, he punctuated his phrases with strange titterings, and his long, sharp finger-nails cut the air like knives as he gesticulated more and more wildly. His skinny hands were like the claws of some unclean and enormous bird of prey.

"I calculated that it would be a good hour before we could reach the next station, and that long before that I should have fallen a prey to this terrible creature. But I sat idle and motionless, like a helpless bird which a beady-eyed reptile has fascinated and whose life-span depends entirely on the reptile's sovereign will.

" 'Now, my dear friend,' the madman went on with a grin, but at the same time with an air of officious solicitude, 'I know that I shall be able to free you from your trouble.'

"There was a touch of irony in his manner, yet he spoke with intent, confident seriousness. I could feel my pupils grow larger. But I could not move. The man had opened a case of surgical instruments, and the light glittered on an array of knives, hooks, needles and strangely formed murderous contraptions such as I had never seen before.

" 'Your trouble would soon have reached the chronic stage and would have been very difficult to handle.'

"He stopped, took out a terrible tiny scalpel and began to whet it on his thumb-nail, blinking impertinently at my trembling legs as he did so.

" 'Lie down on the bench!'

"This rude command brought a red flush of indignation to my pale cheeks. Yet I had no choice but to obey, not simply because I was afraid of the fellow—although I was never so deathly afraid of anything in my life—but because I no longer had any command over my own members. So I slipped down on my stomach on the bench. But he squealed at me indignantly—he seemed to take the position I was trying to assume as a deadly insult:

" 'Not with your backside up like that! Face up, I tell you! I must get at your face!'

"And when I was slow and clumsy in carrying out his order, he seized me by the shoulder, threw my head back with a jerk, and gazed greedily into my eyes, which suddenly began to water and turn convulsively inward. It was a terrible moment.

" 'A very interesting case!' he exclaimed with a grin. 'A spontaneous complex divergence of the ocular field. You should have come to me long ago. This dangerous strabismus——' And he held a little mirror in front of my eyes.

"It was true. I was cross-eyed. I was so impossibly and idiotically cross-eyed that it was incomprehensible to me that I had never noticed it before. I had never had the slightest suspicion that my eyes were not perfectly straight and parallel.

" 'Don't be alarmed!' he said soothingly, but with that ghoulish sarcasm in his tone again. 'The operation will scarcely cause any pain at all.'

"At that moment I felt a very disagreeable pressure against the pit of my stomach, a pressure that drove the breath almost completely out of me. Some invisible power—for my cataleptic condition made it impossible for me to turn my eyes at the bidding of my will—held me in my uncomfortable and perilous position. I tried to realize that my last

moment had come. But though I had no power to move my frozen muscles, which had surrendered abjectly to the will of another, though my body lay there waiting supinely for my fate, my mind had not surrendered. Something began repeating inside me, with desperate insistence—'The train MUST stop—the train MUST stop——'

"My eyelids were propped open and I could no more have closed them than I could have lifted the car. I lay there gazing in agony at the shining blade which was approaching the corner of my eye.

" 'They will be working together in just a moment now. It is a case of double strabismus. Both eyes turn in. The operation is a little complicated. I shall have to cut the muscles and take both eyeballs out, but I will put them back in a moment just as they were, or rather, just as they ought to have been and weren't.'

"Good heavens! He was going to blind me completely, and bleed me to death in the process!

"The awful imminence of my fate all at once gave me the strength to resist. With a fierce yell I leaped to my feet and pushed the creature back.

"The effect of my declaration of independence was astonishing. The old man seemed to shrink into himself, much as I had seen him first, and then—he melted into the air and disappeared. It seemed as if a kind of gray veil floated off out of the window.

"I looked about me in complete bewilderment. The cold sweat was dripping from my forehead.

"The compartment was empty. The train had stopped, out in the open country. I heard the confused sound of many voices arguing, crying, commanding, down on the track below me. Still in a daze, I leaned out of the window.

"A group of men were struggling with an individual who seemed to be possessed with the desperate strength of a giant. His hat had fallen from his head. It was the long-nosed, skinny bird-head of my late companion. With a dozen hands gripping him firmly, the madman suddenly ceased struggling and squealing.

"I heard an agonizing groan. It came from the train, from the next compartment to mine. I opened my door, stepped out on the running-board which extended along the side of the car, and entered the next compartment.

"On one of the benches, a man lay on his back. His face was covered with a cloth. With a beating heart I drew the cloth away. Two suffering eyes stared up at me from a face which had been cruelly slashed with some sharp instrument—two eyes that turned inward toward the bleeding nose. The poor fellow had the worst case of cross-eyes I ever saw in my life!

"I HAVE never fully understood what had happened.

"The man in the next compartment was not seriously injured, but it seemed impossible to arouse him entirely from a sort of frightened lethargy. After his face had been dressed by a surgeon, he did, in my hearing, stammer a disjointed story about a man who had entered his compartment at the last station, remarked on the unfortunate condition of his eyes, produced a set of instruments, ordered him to lie down on the seat, enforcing his will by some strange hypnotic power—all of this strange and puzzling to the poor fellow's other hearers, but familiar and intelligible to me. Just at the moment when the madman was about to attack his victim's eyes with his deadly little knife (I think I understood from the frightened fellow's stammering and bewildered story), the old man staggered

back as if someone had pushed him violently, made a few vicious passes at the prostrate sufferer's face and nose with his weapon—then, the train having come to a stop, he flung his great handkerchief over the still petrified face, crying:

" 'There, you can wipe your bloody nose with that!'

"Then he had flung the compartment door open and jumped out.

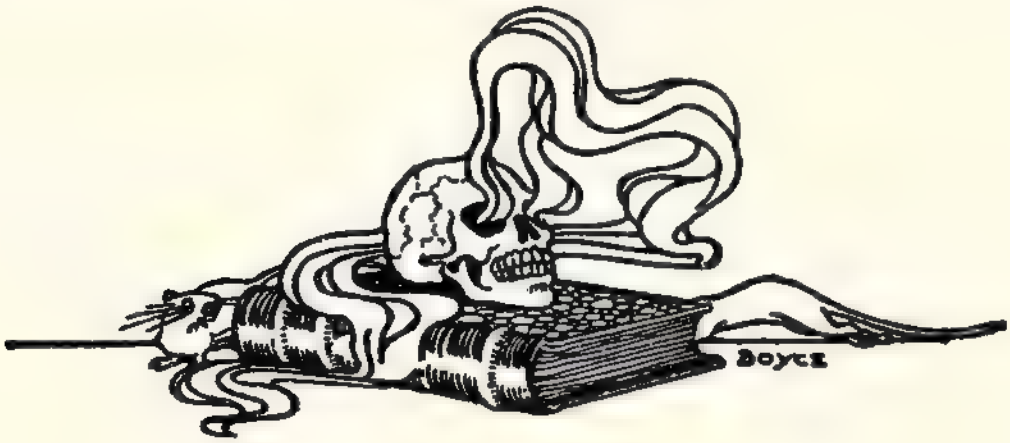
"I learned more of the story from others.

"The engine-driver had obeyed a signal to stop the train. Train employees and passengers had seen a wild creature leap out of a compartment and storm up and down the parallel track, declaiming that he had been in the act of performing a difficult and helpful surgical operation on a suffering fellow-man, and that while so doing he had been feloniously and brutally assaulted by someone on that train. He was the greatest doctor in all the world, he announced in a piercing squeal, a doctor who could raise the dead if need be, and he was determined to have condign punishment visited on the miscreant who had interfered with his noble work, if he found it necessary to punish him himself with the resources of edged tools, poisons, and deadly gases which his science placed at his disposal. This blood-curdling eloquence had frightened various old women and little children into hysterics, but the raving creature had been speedily tied up and silenced.

"That, gentlemen, is all I know.

"Who stopped the train, you ask? Well, I thought for a time that the mad doctor had pulled the cord himself, in his determination to secure the punishment of his wicked assailant—who must have been I myself, as far as I can figure the bewildering thing out. But as I put all the evidence together, I arrived at a different conclusion.

"I remembered that while I still lay on the bench on my back, and seemed to see the horrible glittering eyes boring into mine and the bright little knife coming relentlessly nearer and nearer my face, I was conscious that the train was slowing up. I remembered how earnestly, how determinedly, how *commandingly,* something inside me had insisted that the train must stop. And, gentlemen, as sure as I sit here, I believe that *I myself, lying stark and helpless on that seat, without the power to move a muscle, by the sheer force of my desperate, insistent desire, I stopped that train.*"



The Honor of Don Pedro

By WALLACE J. KNAPP

A bizarre ghost story of old Spain

NOTHING appeared to be unusual about Major Stuart d'Aubigny as he stood in the plaza of Toledo, immaculate from the yellow collar of his blue uniform to where his trousers tucked into his cavalry boots, yet his three friends stared at him in bewilderment.

"You mean you were the—the guest last night of a Spanish *señora?*" Coarse-looking Captain Poiret of the artillery rubbed his tongue over his thick lips. "But where was her husband?"

"He did not interfere."

The hazel eyes of sleek Captain Jules Marteau, attached to the French staff, gleamed in amazement.

"Mais, mon ami," he burst forth, "I know these Spaniards, I. For three years I fight here to help Napoleon keep King Joseph on the throne, but never have I heard of a Spanish don willingly permitting another man to visit his wife. Is he, perhaps, a friend of your family?"

Until now, Major d'Aubigny might have been called handsome. In his face, as well as in his name, lurked evidence of the romance of a bygone Scotch soldier of fortune with a demoiselle of the d'Aubigny family. Fair-haired, taller than most of the Frenchmen in that army in Toledo making its final stand against Wellington's combined British, Portuguese and Spanish force, he had always been sure of a smile from even the black-eyed *señoritas* who hated the foreign intruders. But none of them would have dreamed romance, seeing the black look of hatred now on his face.

"Friend?" he exploded. "He's the worst enemy our family ever had, the treacherous beast! He stole the sweetheart of an ancestor of mine. He used her to get French military secrets which he and the Great Captain used to defeat my country. Indeed he is no friend."

"Yet he let you visit his wife," Marteau insisted.

Before Major d'Aubigny could explain, the fourth member of that little group in the Zocodover interrupted. Jesus-Marie Constans — the sort that could give grace and charm even to a misfit lieutenant's uniform—brought his gaze reluctantly back from the winding Tagus River, seen over the walls of the market place.

"But El Gran Capitán is of the Sixteenth Century," he pointed out.

"This happened in 1503," the major agreed calmly.

Captain Poiret's head came back with such a jerk that he almost displaced his eye-glasses.

"The husband of the *señora* alive in 1503!" he cried. "What is this, a joke? How old is your companion of last night?"

"What matters her age if she be beautiful?"

Lieutenant Constans nodded slightly. Rumor had it that while still a student in Paris he had published a remarkable volume of lyrics whose imaginative charm still stood in the way of his military advancement, blinding his superiors to his bravery in battle. His wide-set, baby blue eyes looked anything but war-like.

"Tell us about her," he begged.

"What can I tell?"

"How did you happen to meet her?" Captain Poiret showed his crooked teeth in a grin of anticipation.

"When we arrived last night, we found you early comers had all the good quarters. They billetted my cavalry in a church beyond the Alcazar, a gloomy old ruin. The moment I stepped inside, I had a queer feeling like—well, once sailing home from the Indies I had the same feeling just before a tornado struck our ship. I get these warnings sometimes."

"Perhaps you owe it to your ancestors. The Scotch have always been fey," Constans remarked, but Poiret glared through his glasses.

"Something exciting is sure to happen," the major went on. "That's why I couldn't sleep. I had a place between a couple of tombs in a little chapel, but I just tossed and turned. Then I was conscious of someone crouching in the shadows. I couldn't see clearly. There was a spear of moonlight on the floor between us. I thought it might be a rebel Spaniard waiting to kill me, and here I lay unarmed. Even my cavalry sword I'd left with the rest of our weapons near the door. I drew my legs stealthily up under me, but before I leaped, either some of the guard threw more fuel on the fire or my eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. Anyway, I suddenly realized it was a woman, kneeling in prayer. She seemed slim, and from the angle of her head, young."

"Young?" echoed Marteau. "Didn't you say her husband—Sixteenth Century—is this a ghost story?"

Poiret, polishing his glasses, growled. "It better not be!"

"But what was she doing in the church?" asked Constans.

"That I couldn't imagine at first. Why would a Spanish *señora* visit a church full of billetted soldiers? Then I realized. This chapel was the shrine, probably, of her patron saint."

"And I suppose she was beautiful." Poiret, the artillery captain, licked his lips.

For a moment, that winter afternoon in 1812, the major remained silent, watching an ox-cart with wheels taller than his six feet of muscular perfection. After it had squeezed into one of the narrow streets opening off Toledo's main plaza, he nodded as though to himself.

"You would not believe my description," he announced. "I shall let you see her. Tonight we'll have a banquet at which she shall be the guest of honor. It will be my revenge."

All three of them echoed the last word.

"Yes, revenge. Her treacherous husband almost lost to my ancestor the patronage of Louis. I was going to put an end to his boasting about it. If you will be witnesses this evening, I agree. Among the regimental baggage I discovered a case or two of champagne, and if you like sherry — well, *messieurs,* shall we meet here in the Zocodover at eleven tonight and go to banquet with the *señora* Dorotea de Donoso?"

At their nod of agreement, he waved a casual salute and turned away.

His three friends watched him descend the sloping street past the inn where once Cervantes had lived. Marteau gave a characteristic shrug.

"Impossible!" he murmured. "She won't come tonight. The Spanish women are better guarded than Napoleon's diamonds."

Constans drew a long breath.

"Dorotea de Donoso," he repeated, rolling the syllables on his tongue like a savory morsel. "No wonder they call Spain the Land of Romance. Why, even

the names of the people embody its poetry and imagination."

"Well, that story of the major's better not be imagination," Poiret growled. "If it's a joke, I'll call him out and shoot him."

"We'll all massacre him," Marteau agreed. "No matter how much champagne he gives me, I'll never forgive him if he makes a fool out of me. I almost believe his story."

"I do believe it." Constans' handsome face was serious. "Stuart met someone last night who made a tremendous impression. I noticed the change the first moment I saw him."

"I, too," Marteau agreed. "But I thought he was tired from the ride."

"And now we know it was insomnia," Poiret leered. "You know the Spanish proverb: 'Insomnia near a beautiful woman is the gift of Heaven.' I hope we see something worth while tonight."

"We shall," Constans promised, and there was a far-away look in his blue eyes.

2

THROUGH the cobbled streets of Toledo, so narrow that cart hubs had worn ruts in the walls on either side, Major d'Aubigny guided his three guests about midnight, with a full moon trying to cast light into the canyons between the adobe houses. Of the *señoritas* leaning over the mantilla-draped balconies, few smiled and none spoke, since most of the inhabitants of Toledo sided with Wellington and hoped to throw off Napoleonic domination.

The officers still kept looking at him askance, half suspecting the whole thing was a joke. And when they reached the ruined church, it looked as though they had grounds for their suspicions. The sentinel, standing stiffly at the door, directed them into a gloomy place where canvas and blankets curtained off even those windows behind which the moon should be visible.

Their boots echoed hollowly as they clanked across the stone floor to a table set before the great altar. A few smoking lanterns and a half-dozen candles on the table let them barely make out the bottles and glasses. They sat on carved larchwood choir benches, the only wood that had escaped the bonfires.

"But where's the *señora?*" Captain Poiret demanded with a grin that revealed his disfiguring teeth. "Will she come?"

"She'll be here." The calm assurance of the major's voice fell upon them like a chill. "It is not time yet for you to meet her."

"But you weren't serious about her husband being a general back in the time of the Gran Capitán?" he persisted.

"When you have seen her, I'll explain."

"See?" grumbled the artillery officer. "How do you expect us to see her when I can't see my hand before my face?"

"When the time comes, there will be plenty of light, too," their host promised, but Marteau had already begun to feel creepy. Quite the opposite of the major in appearance, small and dark, for he claimed no Scotch ancestors, fiery and hot-tempered, he displayed his lack of orderliness in the bagginess of his trousers and the careless way his coat was buttoned. But he was no fool. He had begun to suspect that something was wrong in the ruined, gloomy church. He remembered the report of some Spanish rebels who had poisoned a roomful of French invaders, invited to a banquet, and had burned the dwelling. Could it be that d'Aubigny had gone crazy or had sold out to the rebels?

The popping of champagne corks

brought him out of his revery. Even the feeble light let him admire the deft way their host thumbed out the stoppers and let the sparkling liquor cascade into their glasses. After one taste, Marteau felt that he would be willing to toast with such nectar the ugliest of Spanish matrons and at d'Aubigny's behest hail her as queen of love and beauty. Then he noticed that Constans was not emptying his goblet as frequently as the others did.

"Drink! Drink, *mon ami,*" he urged.

"I am waiting for *la doña* Dorotea," the lieutenant barely whispered, his blue eyes seeming to look into the future.

"All in time," the major promised. "Moonlight is the light for love. In the moonlight you shall see her, and after that, my revenge." He looked up at one of the curtained windows. "Time for one more glass," he calculated. "To the loveliest lady in the world."

"More beautiful because she is the wife of an enemy," Poiret cackled.

"Shut up!" Constans almost spit at him.

With meaningless laughter Marteau and the artillery officer arose unsteadily to drink the toast. Then Major d'Aubigny caught up one of the candles.

"And now, *messieurs,* to My Lady's sleeping-chambers."

The others, only slightly more sure of their footing, serpentined after him toward the little chapel. At the stone railing he stopped them with a gesture and went on alone. Stopping before the window, he reached up and with a single tug tore away the curtain stretched across the colored glass.

He had calculated well. Like a theatrical spotlight, the moonlight streamed in to pick out a lady kneeling on a tomb. From the other side of the railing came a burst of ribald laughter.

"A damned monument!" shouted Marteau.

"In love with a statue!" scoffed Poiret, showing his crooked teeth, but Lieutenant Constans caught his breath.

"Lovely!" he whispered. "Under the moonlight, she might be flesh and blood."

"So she's the woman who married the conqueror of your ancestor?" cackled Marteau. "What a pity she isn't alive! Plenty of ways you could have had a very enjoyable revenge.

"And under her husband's eyes at that," added the artillery officer.

"He looks as though he guarded her even in death," Constans mused. And indeed, as their eyes became accustomed to the light, they could see the armored figure on the tomb next to hers, his gauntletted hands resting on his sword and a strained, watchful look upon his face turned in her direction.

They chattered with liquor-loosened tongues.

"What do you think of my last night's companion?" the major finally demanded.

"He whose chisel created her was a genius," Constans declared. "I can understand why Pygmalion hoped to bring his statue to life with a kiss."

"A kiss," laughed d'Aubigny, and then more violently: "That's it, a kiss. A kiss with her husband, the grandee, looking on. Watch, you dullards. Learn how a beautiful Spanish *señora* should be loved."

He tottered toward her, but Constans, vaulting over the railing, was at his side, clutching his shoulder.

"Don't be a fool," he cried. "Don't insult the dead!"

"Insult? I wish I could. But my kisses are no insult to a lovely woman."

"Her husband was a Spanish grandee," the lieutenant insisted, "and you know how Spaniards worship family honor."

"Don't we French regard our family honor?" the major snarled. "Here. Look at this. You read Spanish, don't you?"

With a finger trembling with rage, he followed along the inscription on the tomb, picked out by the moonlight.

AQUÍ YACE DON PEDRO DONOSO
GUERRERO CABALLERO

"And see what else it says: 'Whose victory at the Garigliano in 1503 brought dominion to his king and honor to himself.' *Caballero,* is he, when he stole another man's sweetheart? And great warrior when he learned by treachery all his enemy's plans? When I saw his monument last night, I knew I was fated to avenge my ancestor. I made up my mind to despoil this boasting monument before I left, but you have shown me a better way. I hope that from wherever Spanish warriors go, he is looking down to see how I take my revenge."

"You're drunk, Stuart," Constans told him, "or you'd never so debase yourself. The man's dead. You're not insulting him. It's a crime against lovely womanhood to pollute that statue with your beastly caresses."

"Vive la France!" Marteau called out in a cracked voice. "Down with the dons!"

The major flung off Constans' restraining hand.

"Look down, don Pedro Donoso. The d'Aubigny are revenged." He took a step nearer that miracle in marble. "Come, *señora!* Forget your decrepit old Spanish husband. Show me how warm-blooded Spanish maidens love."

One more step he took, between the tombs, then half turned his head to mock the kneeling caballero behind him.

"Watch, cuckold!" he jeered. "My revenge is complete. Now boast your honor of a grandee, if you can."

He bent to kiss the kneeling woman.

Only Constans saw what happened next. The artillery officer had his glasses off and was polishing them. Marteau had turned for a goblet of wine to toast the occasion and the next he knew Major d'Aubigny lay dead on the floor of the chapel, his skull bashed in behind.

To the billetted cavalrymen who rushed up alarmed by the shouting, Constans explained that their leader had lost his footing and slipped. He realized the impossibility of making those uncouth soldiers believe what his eyes had seen, but even his reason refused to accept. Yet he knew no mere fall could so have crushed the major's head.

A queer, creepy feeling ran up and down his spine as he remembered that scowl darkening don Pedro's brow, and saw that gauntletted hand crash down upon the insulter of his honor. And wasn't there a changed expression in the features of that stone caballero? They had lost that strained, watchful look, and instead there appeared the proud, haughty gaze befitting an honorable grandee.

The Violet Death

By GUSTAV MEYRINK*

A brief story of Tibet and the gruesome power of a shouted word

A DAY or two before Pompejus Jaburek died in the hospital in Lucknow, he called the head nurse, entrusted to her a bulky envelope which he had been keeping under his pillow, and urged her, after his death, to see that its contents were given as wide publicity as possible. She might turn it over to the Government, to the press—she would know better than he how it could be made widely known. He had no doubt that the information contained in it was profoundly important—at least it was extremely strange and curious—and the only reason why he had not told his whole story when he had first got back to civilization and safety was that he was afraid of being tempted to betray a secret which might do the world incalculable harm. Well—she would understand what he meant when she had read his story, and after all, the delay was not important, since he was growing so much weaker that he knew he could not live a great deal longer. And when he died, carrying the secret with him, the danger would be over, at least the danger of any harm for which he should be responsible, and only the strange and perhaps valuable information would remain.

Pompejus Jaburek was a nondescript southeast European who had been a servant of the British explorer Sir Roger Thornton. The most remarkable thing about him was that he was as deaf as a post—he had told the nurse once that he had gone stone-deaf as a child and had never heard a sound since—but that he was so expert at lip-reading that in a good light he could talk to you for hours, so easily and intelligently that you would have had no suspicion of his deafness if it had not been for the careful, singsong tone that all deaf persons acquire, like the extraordinarily cautious step of a blind man. Aside from this, his English was perfect.

He had been brought to the hospital from somewhere off to the north, two or three months before, in a very dilapidated condition, with a bad wound in his foot, and apparently with his mind clean gone. He had recovered his faculties in time, and had grown so much better that he was able to sit up in bed and write, industriously, for hours—hence the manuscript which he was bequeathing to the hospital—but although he talked intelligently and sometimes rather freely, his eyes glittered with terror when anything was said about his relations with Sir Roger, and he would cut the discussion short with a curt declaration that he was sure the English explorer would never be seen again. And since no one was sure that Pompejus Jaburek was entirely sane, no one pressed him for an explanation. He wasted away from what seemed to be the effects of a slow poison, and one morning he did not awaken.

His manuscript, written in spite of great weakness and distress of mind, was almost impossible to decipher and was full of gaps and inconsistencies. But its drift was approximately as follows:

* Adapted by Roy Temple House from the German.

SOMEWHERE up on the Tibetan frontier, Sir Roger Thornton had been visited by a Tibetan "Sannyasin" or penitential pilgrim, on his way to Benares. Sir Roger had a profound respect for the Sannyasin. He knew that they are pretty sure to be intelligent, and that they are filled with an earnestness that makes them entirely honest. He did not know why the Sannyasin told him the story of the strange Tibetan colony in the isolated valley, but he had seen and heard so many mysterious things in his contacts with this strange race that nothing he heard about them surprized him. He knew that they hate the Europeans and that they cherish magic secrets with which they hope some day to destroy them. But Sir Hannibal Roger Thornton was one of the bravest men who ever lived, and he determined at once to see with his own eyes whether this colony possessed the magical powers which the Sannyasin imputed to them.

Sir Roger had a group of Asiatic guides and servants with him, but he knew that they were superstitious and cowardly, and that they would be entirely useless on such an expedition as this. So he touched his deaf Balkan lieutenant with his stick, and he told him in detail all that he had learned from the Tibetan ascetic.

Some twenty days' journey from their camp, in a side valley of the Himavat, which had been so carefully described to him that he could go directly to it, it appeared that there was a very curious bit of territory. It was a tiny valley, and on three sides of it the mountains rose almost perpendicularly, so that there was no entrance or egress except from the fourth side, and the fourth side was very strangely cut off by gaseous exhalations which rose constantly from the spongy earth, and which were so deadly poisonous that any living being which tried to cross would be almost certain to be suffocated and never reach the other side. In the ravine itself, which was reported to be in dimensions perhaps half a dozen miles each way, lived a little tribe, in the midst of the most luxuriant vegetation, a tribe belonging to the Tibetan race, wearing a characteristic pointed red cap, and worshipping a Satanic being in the form of a peacock. This devilish being, in the course of the centuries, had taught the tribe a potent black magic, and had transmitted secrets to them which were capable, in time, of changing the face of the earth. Thus, they had perfected a kind of melody, which if properly executed would destroy the strongest man in an instant. . . .

Pompejus grinned sarcastically.

Sir Roger explained to him that he had thought out a way of passing the poison-gas region with the help of diving-helmets and reservoirs of compressed air, and that he was sure there would be no serious difficulty about reaching the valley in this way. Pompejus Jaburek nodded approval, and rubbed his dirty hands together delightedly.

THE Tibetan pilgrim had told the exact truth. The two Europeans reached a spot where the strange ravine was plainly visible, with its marvelous vegetation; and between it and them stretched a yellow-brown, desert-like girdle of loose, friable earth, not more than a mile wide, and cutting the marvelous valley completely off from the rest of the world.

The exhalations which rose incessantly from the girdle of desert were pure carbonic acid gas. Sir Roger Thornton climbed a little hill and studied the situation very carefully. Then he decided to cross the poisonous belt the next morning. The diving-outfits which he had ordered from Bombay worked perfectly.

Pompejus carried two repeating rifles and various other articles which his chief deemed necessary.

An intrepid Afghan adventurer who had first thought of accompanying the two had flatly refused to go along when he had learned that the black art was involved. He had remarked that he was perfectly willing to crawl into a tiger's den, but that he declined to embark on an enterprise which might imperil his immortal soul. So Sir Roger and Jaburek constituted the expeditionary force.

THE copper helmets glittered in the sun. The poison-gas crept out of the spongy soil in numberless tiny bubbles. Sir Roger had set out at a rapid, swinging gait, so that there would be no danger that the supply of air would be exhausted before the gas-zone was passed. The mountain-backed valley in front of the two floated and swayed before the eyes of the invaders like the bed of a moving brook. The sunlight had a ghostly green tinge and colored the distant glaciers—the "Roof of the World"—with its gigantic profile, like a wonderful landscape of death.

Sir Roger and Pompejus had passed the arid belt. had stepped out on the beautiful green turf, and with the help of a match or two had convinced themselves that good oxygen was present at every distance from the ground. Then the two removed their diving-outfits.

Behind them the wall of gas wavered like a strangely tenuous stream. The air was filled with a heady perfume, like the odor of amberia blossoms. Gleaming, party-colored butterflies as big as your hand, with markings these white men had never seen before, sat on the silent flowers with their wings spread wide, like open conjurers' books.

The two, several steps apart, moved toward the little wood which cut off their view of the main part of the valley. . . .

Sir Roger gave his deaf servant a sign—he was sure he had heard a noise. Pompejus lifted the trigger of his gun. . . .

They skirted the little forest, and came out on a broad meadow. A quarter of a mile from the wood, they saw perhaps a hundred men, evidently Tibetans, all topped with pointed red caps, and drawn up in a semicircle. They must have had wind of their visitors' coming, and they were ready to receive them. Sir Roger and his servant walked intrepidly, abreast of each other, but several feet apart, toward the waiting phalanx.

These Tibetans were dressed in the sheepskin coats which are the usual garb of the race; but as the Europeans came nearer to them they were startled by the unearthly ugliness of all the faces, which were naturally hideous and were moreover distorted by expressions of violent loathing, hatred and malice. They allowed the two to come very near them; then all at once, in perfect unison like one man, at a signal from a leader they all raised their hands and held them tight against their ears. Then they all shouted something at the top of their voices.

Pompejus Jaburek looked toward his master for instructions, and brought his gun into position, for the strange maneuver of the group seemed to presage some hostile intention. But what he saw as he glanced at Sir Roger drove every drop of his blood from his heart.

About the Englishman a trembling, floating garment of gas had formed, like that which the two had traversed a short time before. Sir Roger's form began to lose its contours, as if it had been attacked by the gas and were disintegrating under its influence. The head seemed to grow pointed; then the whole mass began

to sink into itself as if it were dissolving, and on the spot where a few moments before the big, athletic Englishman had stood, nothing was visible any longer but a clear violet cone like a great lump of colored sugar. . . .

Deaf Pompejus was seized with an impulse of mad rage. The Tibetans continued to scream, and with his uncanny skill at lip-reading, he noticed that they were uttering the same word or phrase again and again. His anger seemed to have given him a clairvoyant clearness of intelligence, and his lips began to form the sound which he saw on all those ugly lips in front of him. . . .

Suddenly their leader sprang out before them, and they all stopped yelling and took their hands away from their ears. Like panthers they all rushed at Pompejus. The deaf man began to fire into the mob like a madman with his repeating rifle. This stopped them for a moment.

Then, obeying some mysterious impulse, he began to bawl at the company the syllables which he had learned from their lips. He had caught the thing perfectly, and he bellowed it with his mighty lungs like a whole army shouting a war-cry.

He grew dizzy, everything went dim and dark before him. The earth began to sway under his feet, and he came near falling. But the feeling of dizziness lasted only a few seconds, and his mind and his senses cleared again.

The Tibetans had disappeared—disappeared exactly as his master had done—and in their place he saw a great number of the little violet cones.

Their leader was still alive. His legs were already transformed into a bluish paste, and the upper part of his body was shrinking away. It seemed as if his substance were being digested in a great transparent or invisible stomach. This man did not wear a red cap like the others, but an elaborate head-dress like a bishop's miter, in which yellow, living eyes could be seen moving to and fro. . . .

Jaburek stepped up to the creature and struck him on the head with the butt of his rifle, but his enemy still had the strength to hurl a sickle-shaped weapon at him and wound him in the foot. . . .

The victor stood and looked about him. No living thing was visible anywhere on the plain. . . .

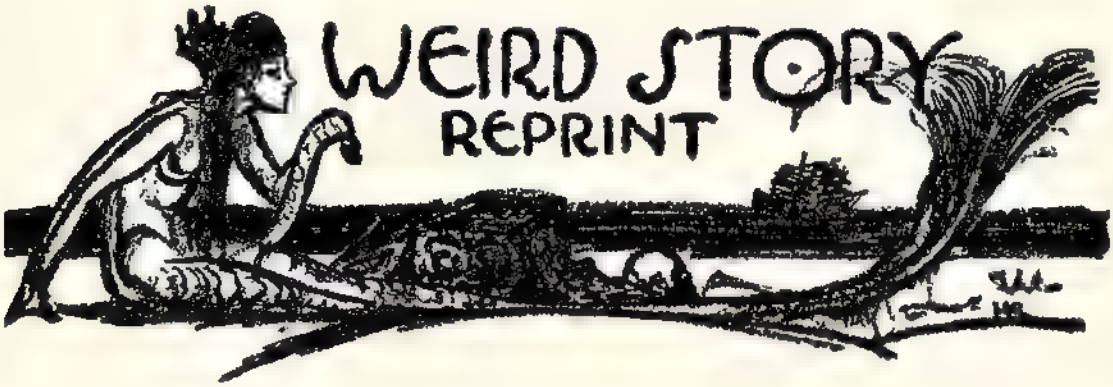
The odor of amberia blossoms had grown so intense that it was almost suffocating. It seemed to be given out by the violet cones, which Pompejus now examined with some care. They were almost entirely uniform, and all consisted of the same clear violet gelatinous slime. Since the Tibetans had moved forward to surround him, Pompejus could not distinguish the remains of Sir Roger from the other violet pyramids.

Mad with rage, Pompejus crushed the pitiful substance of the half-dissolved leader under his heavy heels; then he made his way back to the edge of the green island. The copper helmets lay shining in the sun. . . . He pumped one of the reservoirs full of air and started back across the gas-zone. He struggled on over the strip of desert, his head buzzing with confusion, grief and horror. The ice-topped giants of the Himalayas towered toward heaven—what cared they for the pain and perplexity of a poor deaf vagabond who had lost his best friend and who would have gone to eternity in the same moment with him if it had not been for the accident of his deafness? . . .

* * * * *

"THE knife the fellow threw was poisoned," Pompejus had traced painfully at the end of his manuscript,

"but I think I might have worked the poison out of my system if I hadn't grieved so at the death of Sir Roger, and especially if I had not been tormented all the time by the fear that I should blurt out the awful word some time or other and exterminate a whole roomful, or a hallful, or a streetful, of innocent victims. The crazy thing rings in my head all the time and I can't forget it. But I am so near the end now that I think the world is safe from me. And when I die, the danger will be past. The word will die with me——"



The Wondersmith

By FITZ-JAMES O'BRIEN

1. *Golosh Street and its People*

A SMALL lane, the name of which I have forgotten, or do not choose to remember, slants suddenly off from Chatham Street (before that headlong thoroughfare rushes into the Park), and retreats suddenly down towards the East River, as if it were disgusted with the smell of old clothes, and had determined to wash itself clean. This excellent intention it has, however, evidently contributed towards the making of that imaginary pavement mentioned in the old adage; for it is still emphatically a dirty street. It has never been able to shake off the Hebraic taint of filth which it inherits from the ancestral thoroughfare. It is slushy and greasy, as if it were twin brother of the Roman Ghetto.

I like a dirty slum; not because I am naturally unclean—I have not a drop of Neapolitan blood in my veins—but because I generally find a certain sediment of philosophy precipitated in its gutters. A clean street is terribly prosaic. There is no food for thought in carefully swept pavements, barren kennels, and vulgarly spotless houses. But when I go down a street which has been left so long to itself that it has acquired a distinct outward character, I find plenty to think about. The scraps of sodden letters lying in the ash-barrel have their meaning:

desperate appeals, perhaps, from Tom, the baker's assistant, to Amelia, the daughter of the dry-goods retailer, who is always selling at a sacrifice in consequence of the late fire. That may be Tom himself who is now passing me in a white apron, and I look up at the windows of the house (which does not, however, give any signs of a recent conflagration) and almost hope to see Amelia wave a white pocket-handkerchief.

The bit of orange-peel lying on the sidewalk inspires thought. Who will fall over it? who but the industrious mother of six children, the youngest of which is only nine months old, all of whom are dependent on her exertions for support? I see her slip and tumble. I see the pale face convulsed with agony, and the vain struggle to get up; the pitying crowd closing her off from all air; the anxious young doctor who happened to be passing by; the manipulation of the broken limb, the shake of the head, the moan of the victim, the litter borne on men's shoulders, the gates of the New York hospital unclosing, the subscription taken up on the spot.

There is some food for speculation in that three-year-old, tattered child, masked with dirt, who is throwing a brick at another three-year-old, tattered child, masked with dirt. It is not difficult to perceive that he is destined to lurk, as it were, through life. His bad, flat face—or, at least, what can be seen of it—does not look as if it were made for the light of day. The mire in which he wallows now is but a type of the moral mire in which he will wallow hereafter. The feeble little hand lifted at this instant to smite his companion, half in earnest, half in jest, will be raised against his fellow-beings for evermore.

Golosh Street—as I will call this nameless lane before alluded to—is an interesting locality. All the oddities of trade seemed to have found their way thither and made an eccentric mercantile settlement. There is a bird-shop at one corner wainscoted with little cages containing linnets, wax-wings, canaries, blackbirds, Mino-birds, with a hundred other varieties, known only to naturalists. Immediately opposite is an establishment where they sell nothing but ornaments made out of the tinted leaves of autumn, varnished and gummed into various forms. Further down is a second-hand book-stall, which looks like a sentry-box mangled out flat, and which is remarkable for not containing a complete set of any work. There is a small chink between two ordinary-sized houses, in which a little Frenchman makes and sells artificial eyes, specimens of which, ranged on a black velvet cushion, stare at you unwinkingly through the window as you pass, until you shudder and hurry on, thinking how awful the world would be if everyone went about without eyelids. There are junk-shops in Golosh Street that seem to have got hold of all the old nails in the ark and all the old brass of Corinth. Madame Filomel, the fortune-teller, lives at No. 12 Golosh Street, second story front, pull the bell on the left-hand side. Next door to Madame is the shop of Herr Hippe, commonly called the Wondersmith.

Herr Hippe's shop is the largest in Golosh Street, and to all appearance is furnished with the smallest stock. Beyond a few packing-cases, a turner's lathe, and a shelf laden with dissected maps of Europe, the interior of the shop is entirely unfurnished. The window, which is lofty and wide, but much begrimed with dirt, contains the only pleasant object in the place. This is a beautiful little miniature theater—that is to say, the orchestra and stage. It is fitted with charmingly painted

scenery and all the appliances for scenic changes. There are tiny traps, and delicately constructed "lifts," and real footlights fed with burning-fluid, and in the orchestra sits a diminutive conductor before his desk, surrounded by musical manikins, all provided with the smallest of violoncellos, flutes, oboes, drums, and such like.

There are characters also on the stage. A Templar in a white cloak is dragging a fainting female form to the parapet of a ruined bridge, while behind a great black rock on the left one can see a man concealed, who, kneeling, levels an arquebuse at the knight's heart. But the orchestra is silent; the conductor never beats the time, the musicians never play a note; the Templar never drags his victim an inch nearer to the bridge; the masked avenger takes an eternal aim with his weapon. This repose appears unnatural; for so admirably are the figures executed that they seem replete with life. One is almost led to believe, in looking on them, that they are resting beneath some spell which hinders their motion. One expects every moment to hear the loud explosion of the arquebuse—to see the blue smoke curling, the Templar falling—to hear the orchestra playing the requiem of the guilty.

Few people knew what Herr Hippe's business or trade really was. That he worked at something was evident; else why the shop? Some people inclined to the belief that he was an inventor, or mechanician. His workshop was in the rear of the store, and into that sanctuary no one but himself had admission. He arrived in Golosh Street eight or ten years ago, and one fine morning the neighbors, taking down their shutters, observed that No. 13 had got a tenant. A tall, thin, sallow-faced man stood on a ladder outside the shop entrance, nailing up a large board, on which "Herr Hippe, Wondersmith," was painted in black letters on a yellow ground. The little theater stood in the window, where it stood ever after, and Herr Hippe was established.

But what was a Wondersmith? people asked each other. No one could reply. Madame Filomel was consulted; but she looked grave, and said that it was none of her business. Mr. Pippel, the bird-fancier, who was a German, and ought to know best, thought it was the English for some singular Teutonic profession; but his replies were so vague that Golosh Street was as unsatisfied as ever. Solon, the little humpback, who kept the odd-volume book-stall at the lowest corner, could throw no light upon it. And at length people had to come to the conclusion that Herr Hippe was either a coiner or a magician, and opinions were divided.

2. *A Bottleful of Souls*

It was a dull December evening. There was little trade doing in Golosh Street, and the shutters were up at most of the shops. Hippe's store had been closed at least an hour, and the Mino-birds and Bohemian wax-wings at Mr. Pippel's had their heads tucked under their wings in their first sleep.

Herr Hippe sat in his parlor, which was lit by a pleasant wood-fire. There were no candles in the room, and the flickering blaze played fantastic tricks on the pale gray walls. It seemed the festival of shadows. Processions of shapes, obscure and indistinct, passed across the leaden-hued panels and vanished in the dusk corners. Every fresh blaze flung up by the wayward logs created new images. Now it was a funeral throng, with the bowed figures of mourners, the shrouded coffin, the plumes that waved like extinguished torches; now a knightly caval-

cade with flags and lances, and weird horses, that rushed silently along until they met the angle of the room, when they pranced through the wall and vanished.

On a table close to where Herr Hippe sat was placed a large square box of some dark wood, while over it was spread a casing of steel, so elaborately wrought in an open arabesque pattern that it seemed like a shining blue lace which was lightly stretched over its surface.

Herr Hippe lay luxuriously in his armchair, looking meditatively into the fire. He was tall and thin, and his skin was of a dull saffron hue. Long, straight hair, sharply cut, regular features, a long, thin mustache, that curled like a dark asp around his mouth, the expression of which was so bitter and cruel that it seemed to distill the venom of the ideal serpent, and a bony, muscular form, were the prominent characteristics of the Wondersmith.

The profound silence that reigned in the chamber was broken by a peculiar scratching at the panel of the door, like that which at the French court was formerly substituted for the ordinary knock, when it was necessary to demand admission to the royal apartments. Herr Hippe started, raised his head, which vibrated on his long neck like the head of a cobra when about to strike, and after a moment's silence uttered a strange guttural sound. The door unclosed, and a squat, broad-shouldered woman, with large, wild, oriental eyes, entered softly.

"Ah! Filomel, you are come!" said the Wondersmith, sinking back in his chair. "Where are the rest of them?"

"They will be here presently," answered Madame Filomel, seating herself in an armchair much too narrow for a person of her proportions, and over the sides of which she bulged like a pudding.

"Have you brought the souls?" asked the Wondersmith.

"They are here," said the fortune-teller, drawing a large pot-bellied black bottle from under her cloak. "Ah! I have had such trouble with them!"

"Are they of the right brand—wild, tearing, dark, devilish fellows? We want no essence of milk and honey, you know. None but souls bitter as hemlock or scorching as lightning will suit our purpose."

"You will see, you will see, Grand Duke of Fgypt! They are ethereal demons, every one of them. They are the pick of a thousand births. Do you think that I, old midwife that I am, don't know the squall of the demon child from that of the angel child, the very moment they are delivered? Ask a musician how he knows, even in the dark, a note struck by Thalberg from one struck by Liszt!"

"I long to test them," cried the Wondersmith, rubbing his hands joyfully. "I long to see how little devils will behave when I give them their shapes. Ah! it will be a proud day for us when we let them loose upon the cursed Christian children! Through the length and breadth of the land they will go; wherever our wandering people set foot, and wherever they are, the children of the Christians shall die. Then we, the despised Bohemians, the gipsies, as they call us, will be once more lords of the earth, as we were in the days when the accursed things called cities did not exist, and men lived in the free woods and hunted the game of the forest. Toys indeed! Ay, ay, we will give the little dears toys! toys that all day will sleep calmly in their boxes, seemingly stiff and wooden and without life—but at night, when the souls enter them, will arise and surround the cots of the sleeping children, and pierce their hearts with their keen, envenomed

blades! Toys indeed! Oh, yes! I will sell them toys!"

And the Wondersmith laughed horribly, while the snaky mustache on his upper lip writhed as if it had truly a serpent's power and could sting.

"Have you got your first batch, Herr Hippe?" asked Madame Filomel. "Are they all ready?"

"Oh ay! they are ready," answered the Wondersmith with gusto, opening, as he spoke, the box covered with the blue steel lacework; "they are here."

The box contained a quantity of exquisitely carved wooden manikins of both sexes, painted with great dexterity so as to present a miniature resemblance to nature. They were, in fact, nothing more than admirable specimens of those toys which children delight in placing in various positions on the table—in regiments, or sitting at meals, or grouped under the stiff green trees which always accompany them in the boxes in which they are sold at the toy-shops.

The peculiarity, however, about the manikins of Herr Hippe was not alone the artistic truth with which the limbs and the features were gifted; but on the countenance of each little puppet the carver's art had wrought an expression of wickedness that was appalling. Every tiny face had its special stamp of ferocity. The lips were thin and brimful of malice; the small black bead-like eyes glittered with the fire of a universal hate. There was not one of the manikins, male or female, that did not hold in his or her hand some miniature weapon. The little men, scowling like demons, clasped in their wooden fingers swords delicate as a housewife's needle. The women, whose countenances expressed treachery and cruelty, clutched infinitesimal daggers, with which they seemed about to take some terrible vengeance.

"Good!" said Madame Filomel, taking one of the manikins out of the box and examining it attentively; "you work well, Duke Balthazar! These little ones are of the right stamp; they look as if they had mischief in them. Ah! here come our brothers."

At this moment the same scratching that preceded the entrance of Madame Filomel was heard at the door, and Herr Hippe replied with a hoarse, guttural cry. The next moment two men entered. The first was a small man with very brilliant eyes. He was wrapt in a long shabby cloak, and wore a strange nondescript species of cap on his head, such a cap as one sees only in the low billiard-rooms in Paris. His companion was tall, long-limbed, and slender; and his dress, although of the ordinary cut, either from the disposition of colors, or from the careless, graceful attitudes of the wearer, assumed a certain air of picturesqueness. Both the men possessed the same marked oriental type of countenance which distinguished the Wondersmith and Madame Filomel. True gipsies they seemed, who would not have been out of place telling fortunes, or stealing chickens in the green lanes of England, or wandering with their wild music and their sleight-of-hand tricks through Bohemian villages.

"Welcome, brothers!" said the Wondersmith; "you are in time. Sister Filomel has brought the souls, and we are about to test them. Monsieur Kerplonne, take off your cloak. Brother Oaksmith, take a chair. I promise you some amusement this evening; so make yourselves comfortable. Here is something to aid you."

And while the Frenchman Kerplonne and his tall companion, Oaksmith, were obeying Hippe's invitation, he reached

over to a little closet let into the wall, and took thence a squat bottle and some glasses, which he placed on the table.

"Drink, brothers!" he said: "it is not Christian blood, but good stout wine of Oporto. It goes right to the heart, and warms one like the sunshine of the south."

"It is good," said Kerplonne, smacking his lips with enthusiasm.

"Why don't you keep brandy? Hang wine!" cried Oaksmith, after having swallowed two bumpers in rapid succession.

"Bah! Brandy has been the ruin of our race. It has made us sots and thieves. It shall never cross my threshold," cried the Wondersmith, with a somber indignation.

"A little of it is not bad, though, Duke," said the fortune-teller. "It consoles us for our misfortunes; it gives us the crowns we once wore; it restores to us the power we once wielded; it carries us back, as if by magic, to that land of the sun from which fate has driven us; it darkens the memory of all the evils that we have for centuries suffered."

"It is a devil; may it be cursed!" cried Herr Hippe, passionately. "It is a demon that stole from me my son, the finest youth in all Courland. Yes! my son, the son of the Waywode Balthazar, Grand Duke of Lower Egypt, died raving in a gutter, with an empty brandy-bottle in his hands. Were it not that the plant is a sacred one to our race, I would curse the grape and the vine that bore it."

This outburst was delivered with such energy that the three gipsies kept silence. Oaksmith helped himself to another glass of port, and the fortune-teller rocked to and fro in her chair, too much overawed by the Wondersmith's vehemence of manner to reply. The little Frenchman, Kerplonne, took no part in the discussion, but seemed lost in admiration of the manikins, which he took from the box in which they lay, handling them with the greatest care.

After the silence had lasted for about a minute, Herr Hippe broke it with the sudden question, "How does your eye get on, Kerplonne?"

"Excellently, Duke. It is finished. I have it here." And the little Frenchman put his hand into his breeches pocket and pulled out a large artificial human eye. Its great size was the only thing in this eye that would lead anyone to suspect its artificiality. It was at least twice the size of life; but there was a fearful speculative light in its iris, which seemed to expand and contract like the eye of a living being, that rendered it a horrible staring paradox. It looked like the naked eye of the Cyclops, torn from his forehead, and still burning with wrath and the desire for vengeance.

The little Frenchman laughed pleasantly as he held the eye in his hand, and gazed down on that huge, dark pupil, that stared back at him, it seemed, with an air of defiance and mistrust.

"It is a devil of an eye," said the little man, wiping the enameled surface with an old silk pocket-handkerchief; "it reads like a demon. My niece—the unhappy one—has a wretch of a lover, and I have a long time feared that she would run away with him. I could not read her correspondence, for she kept her writing-desk closely locked. But I asked her yesterday to keep this eye in some very safe place for me. She put it, as I knew she would, into her desk, and by its aid I read every one of her letters. She was to run away next Monday, the ungrateful! but she will find herself disappointed."

And the little man laughed heartily at the success of his stratagem, and polished

and fondled the great eye until that optic seemed to grow sore with rubbing.

"And you have been at work, too, I see, Herr Hippe. Your manikins are excellent. But where are the souls?"

"In that bottle," answered the Wondersmith, pointing to the pot-bellied black bottle that Madame Filomel had brought with her. "Yes, Monsieur Kerplonne," he continued, "my manikins are well made. I invoked the aid of Abigor, the demon of soldiery, and he inspired me. The little fellows will be famous assassins when they are animated. We will try them tonight."

"Good!" cried Kerplonne, rubbing his hands joyously. "It is close upon New Year's day. We will fabricate millions of the little murderers by New Year's eve, and sell them in large quantities; and when the households are all asleep, and the Christian children are waiting for Santa Claus to come, the small ones will troop from their boxes, and the Christian children will die. It is famous! Health to Abigor!"

"Let us try them at once," said Oaksmith. "Is your daughter, Zonéla, in bed, Herr Hippe? Are we secure from intrusion?"

"No one is stirring about the house," replied the Wondersmith, gloomily.

Filomel leaned over to Oaksmith, and said in an undertone, "Why do you mention his daughter? You know he does not like to have her spoken about."

"I will take care that we are not disturbed," said Kerplonne, rising. "I will put my eye outside the door, to watch."

He went to the door and placed his great eye upon the floor with tender care. As he did so, a dark form, unseen by him or his second vision, glided along the passage noiselessly, and was lost in the darkness.

"Now for it!" exclaimed Madame Filomel, taking up her fat black bottle. "Herr Hippe, prepare your manikins!"

The Wondersmith took the little dolls out, one by one, and set them upon the table. Such an array of villainous countenances was never seen. An army of Italian bravoes, seen through the wrong end of a telescope, or a band of prisoners at the galleys in Lilliput, will give some faint idea of the appearance they presented. While Madame Filomel uncorked the black bottle, Herr Hippe covered the dolls with a species of linen tent, which he took also from the box. This done, the fortune-teller held the mouth of the bottle to the door of the tent, gathering the loose cloth closely round the glass neck. Immediately tiny noises were heard inside the tent. Madame Filomel removed the bottle, and the Wondersmith lifted the covering in which he had enveloped his little people.

A wonderful transformation had taken place. Wooden and inflexible no longer, the crowd of manikins were now in full motion. The bead-like eyes turned, glittering, on all sides; the thin, wicked lips quivered with bad passions; the tiny hands sheathed and unsheathed the little swords and daggers. Episodes, common to life, were taking place in every direction. Here two martial manikins paid court to a pretty, sly-faced female, who smiled on each alternately, but gave her hand to be kissed to a third manikin, an ugly little scoundrel, who crouched behind her. There a pair of friendly dolls walked arm in arm, apparently on the best terms, while, all the time, one was watching his opportunity to stab the other in the back.

"I think they'll do," said the Wondersmith, chuckling as he watched these various incidents. "Treacherous, cruel,

bloodthirsty. All goes marvelously well. But stay! I will put the grand test to them."

So saying, he drew a gold dollar from his pocket, and let it fall on the table, in the very midst of the throng of manikins. It had hardly touched the table when there was a pause on all sides. Every head was turned towards the dollar. Then about twenty of the little creatures rushed towards the glittering coin. One, fleeter than the rest, leaped upon it and drew his sword. The entire crowd of little people had now gathered round this new center of attraction. Men and women struggled and shoved to get nearer to the piece of gold. Hardly had the first Lilliputian mounted upon the treasure, when a hundred blades flashed back a defiant answer to his, and a dozen men, sword in hand, leaped upon the yellow platform and drove him off at the sword's point. Then commenced a general battle. The miniature faces were convulsed with rage and avarice. Each furious doll tried to plunge dagger or sword into his or her neighbor, and the women seemed possessed by a thousand devils.

"They will break themselves into atoms," cried Filomel, as she watched with eagerness this savage *mêlée*. "You had better gather them up, Herr Hippe. I will exhaust my bottle and suck all the souls back from them."

"Oh, they are perfect devils! they are magnificent little demons!" cried the Frenchman, with enthusiasm. "Hippe, you are a wonderful man. Brother Oaksmith, you have no such man as Hippe among your English gipsies."

"Not exactly," answered Oaksmith, rather sullenly, "not exactly. But we have men there who can make a twelve-year-old horse look like a four-year-old—and who can take you and Herr Hippe up with one hand, and throw you over their shoulders."

"The good God forbid!" said the little Frenchman. "I do not love such play. It is incommodious."

While Oaksmith and Kerplonne were talking, the Wondersmith had placed the linen tent over the struggling dolls, and Madame Filomel, who had been performing some mysterious manipulations with her black bottle, put the mouth once more to the door of the tent. In an instant the confused murmur within ceased. Madame Filomel corked the bottle quickly. The Wondersmith withdrew the tent, and, lo! the furious dolls were once more wooden-jointed and inflexible; and the old sinister look was again frozen on their faces.

"They must have blood, though," said Herr Hippe, as he gathered them up and put them into their box. "Mr. Pippel, the bird-fancier, is asleep. I have a key that opens his door. We will let them loose among the birds; it will be rare fun."

"Magnificent!" cried Kerplonne. "Let us go on the instant. But first let me gather up my eye."

The Frenchman pocketed his eye, after having given it a polish with the silk handkerchief; Herr Hippe extinguished the lamp; Oaksmith took a last bumper of port; and the four gipsies departed for Mr. Pippel's, carrying the box of manikins with them.

3. Solon

THE shadow that glided along the dark corridor, at the moment that Monsieur Kerplonne deposited his sentinel eye outside the door of the Wondersmith's apartment, sped swiftly through the passage and ascended the stairs to the attic. Here the shadow stopped at the

entrance to one of the chambers and knocked at the door. There was no reply.

"Zonéla, are you asleep?" said the shadow, softly.

"Oh, Solon, is it you?" replied a sweet low voice from within. "I thought it was Herr Hippe. Come in."

The shadow opened the door and entered. There were neither candles nor lamp in the room; but through the projecting window, which was open, there came the faint gleams of the starlight, by which one could distinguish a female figure seated on a low stool in the middle of the floor.

"Has he left you without light again, Zonéla?" asked the shadow, closing the door of the apartment. "I have brought my little lantern with me, though."

"Thank you, Solon," answered she called Zonéla; "you are a good fellow. He never gives me any light of an evening, but bids me go to bed. I like to sit sometimes and look at the moon and the stars—the stars more than all; for they seem all the time to look right back into my face, very sadly, as if they would say, 'We see you, and pity you, and would help you, if we could.' But it is so mournful to be always looking at such myriads of melancholy eyes! and I long so to read those nice books that you lend me, Solon!"

By this time the shadow had lit the lantern and was a shadow no longer. A large head, covered with a profusion of long blond hair, which was cut after that fashion known as *aux enfants d'Edouard;* a beautiful pale face, lit with wide, blue, dreamy eyes; long arms and slender hands, attenuated legs, and—an enormous hump;—such was Solon, the shadow. As soon as the humpback had lit the lamp, Zonéla arose from the low stool on which she had been seated, and took Solon's hand affectionately in hers.

Zonéla was surely not of gipsy blood. That rich auburn hair, that looked almost black in the lamplight, that pale, transparent skin, tinged with an under-glow of warm rich blood, the hazel eyes, large and soft as those of a fawn, were never begotten of a Zingaro. Zonéla was seemingly about sixteen; her figure, although somewhat thin and angular, was full of the unconscious grace of youth. She was dressed in an old cotton print, which had been once of an exceedingly boisterous pattern, but was now a mere suggestion of former splendor; while round her head was twisted, in fantastic fashion, a silk handkerchief of green ground spotted with bright crimson. This strange head-dress gave her an elfish appearance.

"I have been out all day with the organ, and I am so tired, Solon!—not sleepy, but weary, I mean. Poor Furbelow was sleepy, though, and he's gone to bed."

"I'm weary, too, Zonéla; not weary as you are, though, for I sit in my little book-stall all day long, and do not drag round an organ and a monkey and play old tunes for pennies—but weary of myself, of life, of the load that I carry on my shoulders;" and, as he said this, the poor humpback glanced sideways, as if to call attention to his deformed person.

"Well, but you ought not to be melancholy amidst your books, Solon. Gracious! If I could only sit in the sun and read as you do, how happy I should be! But it's very tiresome to trudge round all day with that nasty organ, and look up at the houses, and know that you are annoying the people inside; and then the boys play such bad tricks on poor Furbelow, throwing him hot pennies to pick up, and burning his poor little hands; and oh! sometimes, Solon, the men in the street make me so afraid—they speak to me and look at me so oddly!—I'd a great

deal rather sit in your book-stall and read."

"I have nothing but odd volumes in my stall," answered the humpback. "Perhaps that's right, though; for, after all, I'm nothing but an odd volume myself."

"Come, don't be melancholy, Solon. Sit down and tell me a story. I'll bring Furbelow to listen."

So saying, she went to a dusky corner of the cheerless attic room, and returned with a little Brazilian monkey in her arms—a poor, mild, drowsy thing, that looked as if it had cried itself to sleep. She sat down on her little stool, with Furbelow in her lap, and nodded her head to Solon, as much as to say, "Go on; we are attentive."

"You want a story, do you?" said the humpback, with a mournful smile. "Well, I'll tell you one. Only what will your father say, if he catches me here?"

"Herr Hippe is not my father," cried Zonéla, indignantly. "He's a gipsy, and I know I'm stolen; and I'd run away from him, if I only knew where to run to. If I were his child, do you think that he would treat me as he does? make me trudge round the city all day long, with a barrel-organ and a monkey—though I love poor, dear little Furbelow—and keep me up in a garret, and give me ever so little to eat? I know I'm not his child, for he hates me."

"Listen to my story, Zonéla, and we'll talk of that afterwards. Let me sit at your feet;" and, having coiled himself up at the little maiden's feet, he commenced:

"THERE once lived in a great city, just like this city of New York, a poor little hunchback. He kept a second-hand book-stall, where he made barely enough money to keep body and soul together. He was very sad at times, because he knew scarce anyone, and those that he did know did not love him. He had passed a sickly, secluded youth. The children of his neighborhood would not play with him, for he was not made like them; and the people in the streets stared at him with pity, or scoffed at him when he went by. Ah! Zonéla, how his poor heart was wrung with bitterness when he beheld the procession of shapely men and fine women that every day passed him by in the thoroughfares of the great city! How he repined and cursed his fate as the torrent of fleet-footed firemen dashed past him to the toll of the bells, magnificent in their overflowing vitality and strength! But there was one consolation left him—one drop of honey in the jar of gall, so sweet that it ameliorated all the bitterness of life. God had given him a deformed body, but his mind was straight and healthy. So the poor hunchback shut himself into the world of books, and was, if not happy, at least contented. He kept company with courteous paladins, and romantic heroes, and beautiful women; and this society was of such excellent breeding that it never so much as once noticed his poor crooked back or his lame walk.

"The love of books grew upon him with his years. He was remarked for his studious habits; and when, one day, the obscure people that he called father and mother—parents only in name—died, a compassionate book-vender gave him enough stock in trade to set up a little stall of his own. Here, in his book-stall, he sat in the sun all day, waiting for the customers that seldom came, and reading the fine deeds of the people of the ancient time, or the beautiful thoughts of the poets that had warmed millions of hearts before that hour, and still glowed for him with undiminished fire.

"One day, when he was reading some book, that, small as it was, was big

enough to shut the whole world out from him, he heard some music in the street. Looking up from his book, he saw a little girl, with large eyes, playing an organ, while a monkey begged for alms from a crowd of idlers who had nothing in their pockets but their hands. The girl was playing, but she was also weeping. The merry notes of the polka were ground out to a silent accompaniment of tears. She looked very sad, this organ-girl, and her monkey seemed to have caught the infection, for his large brown eyes were moist, as if he also wept.

"The poor hunchback was struck with pity, and called the little girl over to give her a penny—not, dear Zonéla, because he wished to bestow alms, but because he wanted to speak with her. She came, and they talked together. She came the next day—for it turned out that they were neighbors—and the next, and, in short, every day. They became friends. They were both lonely and afflicted, with this difference, that she was beautiful, and he—was a hunchback."

"Why, Solon," cried Zonéla, "that's the very way you and I met!"

"It was then," continued Solon, with a faint smile, "that life seemed to have its music. A great harmony seemed to the poor cripple to fill the world. The carts that took the flour-barrels from the wharves to the store-houses seemed to emit joyous melodies from their wheels. The hum of the great business streets sounded like grand symphonies of triumph. As one who has been traveling through a barren country without much heed feels with singular force the sterility of the lands he has passed through when he reaches the fertile plains that lie at the end of his journey, so the humpback, after his vision had been freshened with this blooming flower, remembered for the first time the misery of the life that he had led. But he did not allow himself to dwell upon the past. The present was so delightful that it occupied all his thoughts. Zonéla, he was in love with the organ-girl."

"Oh, that's so nice!" said Zonéla, innocently—pinching poor Furbelow, as she spoke, in order to dispel a very evident snooze that was creeping over him. "It's going to be a love-story."

"Ah! but, Zonéla, he did not know whether she loved him in return. You forget that he was deformed."

"But," answered the girl gravely, "he was good."

A light like the flash of an aurora illuminated Solon's face for an instant. He put out his hand suddenly, as if to take Zonéla's and press it to his heart; but an unaccountable timidity seemed to arrest the impulse, and he only stroked Furbelow's head—upon which that individual opened one large brown eye to the extent of the eighth of an inch, and, seeing that it was only Solon, instantly closed it again, and resumed his dream of a city where there were no organs and all the copper coin of the realm was iced.

"He hoped and feared," continued Solon, in a low, mournful voice; "but at times he was very miserable, because he did not think it possible that so much happiness was reserved for him as the love of this beautiful, innocent girl. At night, when he was in bed, and all the world was dreaming, he lay awake looking up at the old books against the walls, thinking how he could bring about the charming of her heart.

"One night, when he was thinking of this, with his eyes fixed upon the moldy backs of the odd volumes that lay on their shelves, and looked back at him wistfully, as if they would say, 'We also are like you, and wait to be completed,' it seemed

as if he heard a rustle of leaves. Then one by one, the books came down from their places to the floor, as if shifted by invisible hands, opened their worm-eaten covers, and from between the pages of each the hunchback saw issue forth a curious throng of little people that danced here and there through the apartment. Each one of these little creatures was shaped so as to bear resemblance to some one of the letters of the alphabet. One tall, long-legged fellow seemed like the letter A; a burly fellow, with a big head and a paunch, was the model of B; another leering little chap might have passed for a Q; and so on through the whole. These fairies—for fairies they were—climbed upon the hunchback's bed, and clustered thick as bees upon his pillow.

" 'Come!' they cried to him, 'we will lead you into fairy-land.'

"So saying, they seized his hand, and he suddenly found himself in a beautiful country, where the light did not come from sun or moon or stars, but floated round and over and in everything like the atmosphere. On all sides he heard mysterious melodies sung by strangely musical voices. None of the features of the landscape was definite; yet when he looked on the vague harmonies of color that melted one into another before his sight he was filled with a sense of inexplicable beauty. On every side of him fluttered radiant bodies, which darted to and fro through the illumined space. They were not birds, yet they flew like birds; and as each one crossed the path of his vision he felt a strange delight flash through his brain, and straightway an interior voice seemed to sing beneath the vaulted dome of his temples a verse containing some beautiful thought. The little fairies were all this time dancing and fluttering around him, perching on his head, on his shoulders, or balancing themselves on his finger-tips.

" 'Where am I?' he asked, at last, of his friends, the fairies.

" 'Ah, Solon!' he heard them whisper, in tones that sounded like the distant tinkling of silver bells, 'this land is nameless; but those whom we lead hither, who tread its soil, and breathe its air, and gaze on its floating sparks of light, are poets for evermore.'

"Having said this, they vanished, and with them the beautiful indefinite land, and the flashing lights, and the illumined air; and the hunchback found himself again in bed, with the moonlight quivering on the floor, and the dusty books on their shelves, grim and moldy as ever."

"You have betrayed yourself. You called yourself Solon," cried Zonéla. "Was it a dream?"

"I do not know," answered Solon; "but since that night I have been a poet."

"A poet?" screamed the little organ girl—"a real poet, who makes verses which everyone reads and everyone talks of?"

"The people call me a poet," answered Solon, with a sad smile. "They do not know me by the name of Solon, for I write under an assumed title; but they praise me, and repeat my songs. But Zonéla, I can't sing this load off my back, can I?"

"Oh, bother the hump!" said Zonéla, jumping up suddenly. "You're a poet, and that's enough, isn't it? I'm so glad you're a poet, Solon! You must repeat all your best things to me, won't you?"

Solon nodded assent.

"You don't ask me," he said, "who was the little girl that the hunchback loved."

Zonéla's face flushed crimson. She turned suddenly away, and ran into a dark corner of the room. In a moment

she returned with an old hand-organ in her arms.

"Play, Solon, play!" she cried. "I am so glad that I want to dance. Furbelow, come and dance in honor of Solon the Poet."

It was her confession. Solon's eyes flamed, as if his brain had suddenly ignited. He said nothing; but a triumphant smile broke over his countenance. Zonéla, the twilight of whose cheeks was still rosy with the setting blush, caught the lazy Furbelow by his little paws; Solon turned the crank of the organ, which wheezed out as merry a polka as its asthma would allow, and the girl and the monkey commenced their fantastic dance. They had taken but a few steps when the door suddenly opened, and the tall figure of the Wondersmith appeared on the threshold. His face was convulsed with rage, and the black snake that quivered on his upper lip seemed to rear itself as if about to spring upon the hunchback.

4. *The Manikins and the Minos*

THE four gipsies left Herr Hippe's house cautiously, and directed their steps towards Mr. Pippel's bird-shop. Golosh Street was asleep. Nothing was stirring in that tenebrous slum, save a dog that savagely gnawed a bone which lay on a dust-heap, tantalizing him with the flavor of food without its substance. As the gipsies moved stealthily along in the darkness they had a sinister and murderous air that would not have failed to attract the attention of the policeman of the quarter, if that worthy had not at the moment been comfortably ensconced in the neighboring "Rainbow" bar-room, listening to the improvisations of that talented vocalist, Mr. Harrison, who was making impromptu verses on every possible subject, to the accompaniment of a cithern which was played by a sad little Italian in a large cloak, to whom the host of the "Rainbow" gave so many toddies and a dollar for his nightly performance.

Mr. Pippel's shop was but a short distance from the Wondersmith's house. A few moments, therefore, brought the gipsy party to the door, when, by the aid of a key which Herr Hippe produced, they silently slipped into the entry. Here the Wondersmith took a dark-lantern from under his cloak, removed the cap that shrouded the light, and led the way into the shop, which was separated from the entry only by a glass door, that yielded, like the outer one, to a key which Hippe took from his pocket. The four gipsies now entered the shop and closed the door behind them.

It was a little world of birds. On every side, whether in large or small cages, one beheld balls of various-colored feathers standing on one leg and breathing peacefully. Love-birds, nestling shoulder to shoulder, with their heads tucked under their wings and all their feathers puffed out, so that they looked like globes of malachite; English bullfinches, with ashen-colored backs, in which their black heads were buried, and corselets of a rosy down; Java sparrows, fat and sleek and cleanly; troupials, so glossy and splendid in plumage that they looked as if they were dressed in the celebrated armor of the Black Prince, which was jet, richly damascened with gold; a cock of the rock, gleaming, a ball of tawny fire, like a setting sun; the campanero of Brazil, white as snow, with his dilatable tolling-tube hanging from his head, placid and silent;—these, with a humbler crowd of linnets, canaries, robins, mocking-birds, and phœbes, slumbered calmly in their little cages, that were hung so thickly on the wall as not to leave an inch of it visible.

"Splendid little morsels, all of them!" exclaimed Monsieur Kerplonne. "Ah, we are going to have a rare beating!"

"So Pippel does not sleep in his shop," said the English gipsy, Oaksmith.

"No. The fellow lives somewhere up one of the avenues," answered Madame Filomel. "He came, the other evening, to consult me about his fortune. I did not tell him," she added with a laugh, "that he was going to have so distinguished a sporting party on his premises."

"Come," said the Wondersmith, producing the box of manikins, "get ready with souls, Madame Filomel. I am impatient to see my little men letting out lives for the first time." Just at the moment that the Wondersmith uttered this sentence, the four gipsies were startled by a hoarse voice issuing from a corner of the room, and propounding in the most guttural tones the intemperate query of "What'll you take?" This sottish invitation had scarce been given, when a second extremely thick voice replied from an opposite corner, in accents so rough that they seemed to issue from a throat torn and furrowed by the liquid lava of many bar-rooms, "Brandy and water."

"Holla! who's here?" muttered Herr Hippe, flashing the light of his lantern round the shop.

Oaksmith turned up his coat-cuffs, as if to be ready for a fight; Madame Filomel glided, or rather rolled, towards the door; while Kerplonne put his hand into his pocket, as if to assure himself that his supernumerary optic was all right.

"What'll you take?" croaked the voice in the corner, once more.

"Brandy and water," rapidly replied the second voice in the other corner. And then, as if by a concerted movement, a series of bibular invitations and acceptances were rolled backwards and forwards with a volubility of utterance that threw Patter versus Clatter into the shade.

"What the devil can it be?" muttered the Wondersmith, flashing his lantern here and there. "Ah! it is those Minos."

So saying, he stopped under one of the wicker cages that hung high up on the wall, and raised the lantern above his head, so as to throw the light upon that particular cage. The hospitable individual who had been extending all these hoarse invitations to partake of intoxicating beverages was an inhabitant of the cage. It was a large Mino-bird, who now stood perched on his cross-bar, with his yellowish-orange bill sloped slightly over his shoulder, and his white eye cocked knowingly upon the Wondersmith. The respondent voice in the other corner came from another Mino-bird, who sat in the dusk in a similar cage, also attentively watching the Wondersmith. These Mino-birds have a singular aptitude for acquiring phrases.

"What'll you take?" repeated the Mino, cocking his other eye upon Herr Hippe.

"*Mon Dieu!* what a bird!" exclaimed the little Frenchman. "He is, in truth, polite."

"I don't know what I'll take," said Hippe, as if replying to the Mino-bird; "but I know what you'll get, old fellow! Filomel, open the cage-doors, and give me the bottle."

Filomel opened, one after another, the doors of the numberless little cages, thereby arousing from slumber their feathered occupants, who opened their beaks, and stretched their claws, and stared with great surprize at the lantern and the midnight visitors.

By this time the Wondersmith had performed the mysterious manipulations with the bottle, and the manikins

were once more in full motion, swarming out of their box, sword and dagger in hand, with their little black eyes glittering fiercely, and their white teeth shining. The little creatures seemed to scent their prey. The gipsies stood in the center of the shop, watching the proceedings eagerly, while the Lilliputians made in a body towards the wall and commenced climbing from cage to cage. Then was heard a tremendous fluttering of wings, and faint, despairing "quirks" echoed on all sides. In almost every cage there was a fierce manikin thrusting his sword or dagger vigorously into the body of some unhappy bird. It recalled the antique legend of the battles of the Pigmies and the Cranes. The poor love-birds lay with their emerald feathers dabbled in their heart's blood, shoulder to shoulder in death as in life. Canaries gasped at the bottom of their cages, while the water in their little glass fountains ran red. The bullfinches wore an unnatural crimson on their breasts. The mocking-bird lay on his back, kicking spasmodically, in the last agonies, with a tiny sword-thrust cleaving his melodious throat in twain, so that from the instrument which used to gush with wondrous music only scarlet drops of blood now trickled.

The manikins were ruthless. Their faces were ten times wickeder than ever, as they roamed from cage to cage, slaughtering with a fury that seemed entirely unappeasable. Presently the feathery rustlings became fewer and fainter, and the little pipings of despair died away; and in every cage lay a poor murdered minstrel, with the song that abode within him for ever quenched—in every cage but two, and those two were high up on the wall; and in each glared a pair of wild, white eyes; and an orange beak, tough as steel, pointed threateningly down. With the needles which they grasped as swords all wet and warm with blood, and their bead-like eyes flashing in the light of the lantern, the Lilliputian assassins swarmed up the cages in two separate bodies, until they reached the wickets of the habitations in which the Minos abode.

Mino saw them coming—had listened attentively to the many death-struggles of his comrades, and had, in fact, smelt a rat. Accordingly he was ready for the manikins. There he stood at the barbican of his castle, with formidable beak couched like a lance. The manikins made a gallant charge. "What'll you take?" was rattled out by the Mino, in a deep bass, as with one plunge of his sharp bill he scattered the ranks of the enemy, and sent three of them flying to the floor, where they lay with broken limbs. But the manikins were brave automata, and again they closed and charged the gallant Mino. Again the wicked white eyes of the bird gleamed, and again the orange bill dealt destruction.

Everything seemed to be going on swimmingly for Mino, when he found himself attacked in the rear by two treacherous manikins, who had stolen upon him from behind, through the lattice-work of the cage. Quick as lightning the Mino turned to repel this assault, but all too late; two slender, quivering threads of steel crossed in his poor body, and he staggered into a corner of the cage. His white eyes closed, then opened; a shiver passed over his body, beginning at his shoulder-tips and dying off in the extreme tips of the wings; he gasped as if for air, and then, with a convulsive shudder, which ruffled all his feathers, croaked out feebly his little speech. "What'll you take?" Instantly from the opposite corner came the old response still feebler than the question—a mere

gurgle, as it were, of "Brandy and water." Then all was silent. The Mino-birds were dead.

"They spill blood like Christians," said the Wondersmith, gazing fondly on the manikins. "They will be famous assassins."

5. *Tied Up*

HERR HIPPE stood in the doorway, scowling. His eyes seemed to scorch the poor hunchback, whose form, physically inferior, crouched before that baneful, blazing glance, while its head, mentally brave, reared itself as if to redeem the cowardice of the frame to which it belonged. So the attitude of the serpent: the body pliant, yielding, supple; but the crest thrown aloft, erect, and threatening. As for Zonéla, she was frozen in the attitude of motion—a dancing nymph in colored marble; agility stunned; elasticity petrified.

Furbelow, astonished at this sudden change, and catching, with all the mysterious rapidity of instinct peculiar to the lower animals, at the enigmatical character of the situation, turned his pleading, melancholy eyes from one to another of the motionless three, as if begging that his humble intellect (pardon me, naturalists, for the use of this word "intellect" in the matter of a monkey) should be enlightened as speedily as possible. Not receiving the desired information, he, after the manner of trained animals, returned to his muttons; in other words, he conceived that this unusual entrance, and consequent dramatic tableau, meant "shop." He therefore dropped Zonéla's hand, and pattered on his velvety feet over towards the grim figure of the Wondersmith, holding out his poor little paw for the customary copper. He had but one idea drilled into him—soulless creature that he was—and that was alms. But I have seen creatures that professed to have souls, and that would have been indignant if you had denied them immortality, who took to the soliciting of alms as naturally as if beggary had been the original sin, and was regularly born with them, and never baptized out of them. I will give these Bandits of the Order of Charity this credit, however, that they knew the best highways and the richest founts of benevolence—unlike to Furbelow, who, unreasoning and undiscriminating, begged from the first person that was near. Furbelow, owing to this intellectual inferiority to the before-mentioned Alsatians, frequently got more kicks than coppers, and the present supplication which he indulged in towards the Wondersmith was a terrible confirmation of the rule. The reply to the extended pleading paw was what might be called a double-barreled kick—a kick to be represented by the power of two when the foot touched the object, multiplied by four when the entire leg formed an angle of forty-five degrees with the spinal column. The long, nervous leg of the Wondersmith caught the little creature in the center of the body, doubled up his brown, hairy form, till he looked like a fur driving-glove, and sent him whizzing across the room into a far corner, where he dropped senseless and flaccid.

This vengeance which Herr Hippe executed upon Furbelow seemed to have operated as a sort of escape-valve, and he found voice. He hissed out the question, "Who are you?" to the hunchback; and in listening to that essence of sibilation it really seemed as if it proceeded from the serpent that curled upon his upper lip.

"Who are you? Deformed dog, who are you? What do you here?"

"My name is Solon," answered the fearless head of the hunchback, while the frail, cowardly body shivered and trembled inch by inch into a corner.

"So you come to visit my daughter in the night-time, when I am away?" continued the Wondersmith, with a sneering tone that dropped from his snake-wreathed mouth like poison. "You are a brave and gallant lover, are you not? Where did you win that Order of the Curse of God that decorates your shoulders? The women turn their heads and look after you in the street, when you pass, do they not? lost in admiration of that symmetrical figure, those graceful limbs, that neck pliant as the stem that moors the lotus! Elegant, conquering, Christian cripple, what do you here in my daughter's room?"

Can you imagine Jove, limitless in power and wrath, hurling from his vast grasp mountain after mountain upon the struggling Enceladus—and picture the Titan sinking, sinking deeper and deeper into the earth, crushed and dying, with nothing visible through the superincumbent masses of Pelion and Ossa but a gigantic head and two flaming eyes, that, despite the death which is creeping through each vein, still flash back defiance to the divine enemy? Well, Solon and Herr Hippe presented such a picture, seen through the wrong end of a telescope—reduced in proportion, but alike in action. Solon's feeble body seemed to sink into utter annihilation beneath the horrible taunts that his enemy hurled at him, while the large, brave brow and unconquered eyes still sent forth a magnetic resistance.

Suddenly the poor hunchback felt his arm grasped. A thrill seemed to run through his entire body. A warm atmosphere, invigorating and full of delicious odor, surrounded him. It appeared as if invisible bandages were twisted all about his limbs, giving him a strange strength. His sinking legs straightened. His powerless arms were braced. Astonished, he glanced round for an instant, and beheld Zonéla, with a world of love burning in her large lambent eyes, wreathing her round white arms about his humped shoulders. Then the poet knew the great sustaining power of love. Solon reared himself boldly.

"Sneer at my poor form," he cried, in strong, vibrating tones, flinging out one long arm and one thin finger at the Wondersmith, as if he would have impaled him like a beetle. "Humiliate me if you can. I care not. You are a wretch, and I am honest and pure. This girl is not your daughter. You are like one of those demons in the fairy-tales that held beauty and purity locked in infernal spells. I do not fear you, Herr Hippe. There are stories abroad about you in the neighborhood, and when you pass people say that they feel evil and blight covering over their threshold. You persecute this girl. You are her tyrant. You hate her. I am a cripple. Providence has cast this lump upon my shoulders. But that is nothing. The camel, that is the salvation of the children of the desert, has been given his hump in order that he might bear his human burden better. This girl, who is homeless as the Arab, is my appointed load in life, and, please God, I will carry her on this back, hunched though it may be. I have come to see her because I love her—because she loves me. You have no claim on her; so I will take her from you."

QUICK as lightning the Wondersmith had stridden a few paces, and grasped the poor cripple, who was yet quivering with the departing thunder of his passion. He seized him in his bony,

muscular grasp, as he would have seized a puppet, and held him at arm's length, gasping and powerless; while Zonéla, pale, breathless, entreating, sank half kneeling on the floor.

"Your skeleton will be interesting to science when you are dead, Mr. Solon," hissed the Wondersmith. "But before I have the pleasure of reducing you to an anatomy, which I will assuredly do, I wish to compliment you on your power of penetration, or sources of information; for I know not if you have derived your knowledge from your own mental research or the efforts of others. You are perfectly correct in your statement that this charming young person, who day after day parades the streets with a barrel-organ and a monkey—the last unhappily indisposed at present—listening to the degrading jokes of ribald boys and depraved men—you are quite correct, sir, in stating that she is not my daughter. On the contrary, she is the daughter of an Hungarian nobleman who had the misfortune to incur my displeasure.

"I had a son, crooked spawn of a Christian!—a son, not like you, cankered, gnarled stump of life that you are—but a youth tall and fair and noble in aspect, as became a child of one whose lineage makes Pharaoh modern—a youth whose foot in the dance was as swift and beautiful to look at as the golden sandals of the sun when he dances upon the sea in summer. This youth was virtuous and good; and being of a good race, and dwelling in a country where his rank, gipsy as he was, was recognized, he mixed with the proudest of the land.

"One day he fell in with this accursed Hungarian, a fierce drinker of that devil's blood called brandy. My child until that hour had avoided this bane of our race. Generous wine he drank, because the soul of the sun, our ancestor, palpitated in its purple waves. But brandy, which is fallen and accursed wine, as devils are fallen and accursed angels, had never crossed his lips, until in an evil hour he was seduced by this Christian hog, and from that day forth his life was one fiery debauch, which set only in the black waves of death. I vowed vengeance on the destroyer of my child, and I kept my word. I have destroyed *his* child—not compassed her death, but blighted her life, steeped her in misery and poverty, and now, thanks to the thousand devils, I have discovered a new torture for her heart. She thought to solace her life with a love-episode! Sweet little epicure that she was! She shall have her little crooked lover, shan't she? Oh, yes! she shall have him, cold and stark and livid, with that great, black, heavy hunch, which no back, however broad, can bear, Death, sitting between his shoulders!"

There was something so awful and demoniac in this entire speech and the manner in which it was delivered, that it petrified Zonéla into a mere inanimate figure, whose eyes seemed unalterably fixed on the fierce, cruel face of the Wondersmith. As for Solon, he was paralyzed in the grasp of his foe. He heard, but could not reply. His large eyes, dilated with horror to far beyond their ordinary size, expressed unutterable agony.

The last sentence had hardly been hissed out by the gipsy when he took from his pocket a long, thin coil of whip-cord, which he entangled in a complicated mesh around the cripple's body. It was not the ordinary binding of a prisoner. The slender lash passed and repassed in a thousand intricate folds over the powerless limbs of the poor hunchback. When the operation was completed, he looked as if he had been

sewed from head to foot in some singularly ingenious species of network.

"Now, my pretty lop-sided little lover," laughed Herr Hippe, flinging Solon over his shoulder as a fisherman might fling a netful of fish, "we will proceed to put you into your little cage until your little coffin is quite ready. Meanwhile we will lock up your darling beggar-girl to mourn over your untimely end."

So saying, he stepped from the room with his captive, and securely locked the door behind him.

When he had disappeared, the frozen Zonéla thawed, and with a shriek of anguish flung herself on the inanimate body of Furbelow.

6. *The Poisoning of the Swords*

It was New Year's eve, and 11 o'clock at night. All over this great land, and in every great city in the land, curly heads were lying on white pillows, dreaming of the coming of the generous Santa Claus. Innumerable stockings hung by countless bedsides. Visions of beautiful toys, passing in splendid pageantry through myriads of dimly lit dormitories, made millions of little hearts palpitate in sleep. Ah! what heavenly toys those were that the children of this soil beheld, that mystic night, in their dreams! Painted cars with orchestral wheels, making music more delicious than the roll of planets. Agile men, of cylindrical figure, who sprang unexpectedly out of meek-looking boxes, with a supernatural fierceness in their crimson cheeks and fur-whiskers. Herds of marvelous sheep, with fleeces as impossible as the one that Jason sailed after; animals entirely indifferent to grass and water and "rot" and "ticks." Horses spotted with an astounding regularity, and furnished with the most ingenious methods of locomotion. Slender foreigners, attired in painfully short tunics, whose existence passed in continually turning heels over head down a steep flight of steps, at the bottom of which they lay in an exhausted condition with dislocated limbs, until they were restored to their former elevation, when they went at it again as if nothing had happened. Stately swans, that seemed to have a touch of the ostrich in them; for they swam continually after a piece of iron which was held before them, as if consumed with a ferruginous hunger. Whole farmyards of roosters, whose tails curled the wrong way—a slight defect, that was, however, amply atoned for by the size and brilliancy of their scarlet combs, which, it would appear, Providence had intended for pen-wipers. Pears, that, when applied to youthful lips, gave forth sweet and inspiring sounds. Regiments of soldiers, that performed neat but limited evolutions on cross-jointed contractile battlefields. All these things, idealized, transfigured, and illuminated by the powers and atmosphere and colored lamps of dreamland, did the millions of dear sleeping children behold, the night of the New Year's eve of which I speak.

It was on this night, when Time was preparing to shed his skin, and come out young and golden and glossy as ever—when, in the vast chambers of the universe, silent and infallible preparations were making for the wonderful birth of the coming year—when mystic dews were secreted for his baptism, and mystic instruments were tuned in space to welcome him—it was at this solemn hour that the Wondersmith and his three companions sat in close conclave in the little parlor before mentioned.

(Please turn to page 132)

COMING NEXT MONTH

GLAMOR. The night was thick with it. A blue, blue, star-shot sky. The Gulf spread out to meet it, white under the breath-taking beauty of the great white moon. All the rippling, gurgling voices of a summer sea, all the Circe-scents of jasmine flowers, magnolias, and orange trees in bloom. We couldn't sleep. We couldn't stay inside.

I don't remember who suggested swimming out to the float. We were none of us accountable, exactly. But I remember we all agreed to it, though we all knew that the tide was out and running strong. Indeed, I never knew such another ebb as we felt that night. It swept us out with all the force of the current of a great river in flood-time. And it served to sober us. We were glad to reach the float and lie on it and rest. We knew we could never go back against a tide like that. We'd have to wait till morning.

So Nelson Todd and I made the best of it and slept. But when the hot sun waked us, Shane O'Farrell was gone.

It did not occur to us then to be uneasy. We swam in, dressed, and went down to breakfast. It was only then, when we couldn't find him, and when Todd's family and Todd's servants declared they hadn't seen or heard him, that we began to be alarmed. And by that time it was too late to do any good.

Of course, we searched everywhere, notified his uncle and the authorities. There was a terrible rush and scramble of coast guards, police, and newspaper men for a while. It actually looked at one time as if Todd and I might be accused of making away with him. But O'Farrell's old uncle wouldn't hear of that. Neither would he admit that O'Farrell was dead. Todd and I had no doubts on that score. We knew what the tremendous ebb was like. If it had got O'Farrell——. But it was more than three years before we knew.

For Shane O'Farrell came back, as suddenly, as unexpectedly, as he had gone. . . .

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(Continued from page 130)

There was a fire roaring in the grate. On a table, nearly in the center of the room, stood a huge decanter of port wine, that glowed in the blaze which lit the chamber like a flask of crimson fire. On every side, piled in heaps, inanimate, but scowling with the same old wondrous scowl, lay myriads of the manikins, all clutching in their wooden hands their tiny weapons. The Wondersmith held in one hand a small silver bowl filled with a green, glutinous substance, which he was delicately applying, with the aid of a camel's-hair brush, to the tips of tiny swords and daggers. A horrible smile wandered over his sallow face—a smile as unwholesome in appearance as the sickly light that plays above reeking graveyards.

"Let us drink great drafts, brothers," he cried, leaving off his strange anointment for a while, to lift a great glass, filled with sparkling liquor, to his lips. "Let us drink to our approaching triumph. Let us drink to the great poison, Macousha. Subtle seed of Death—swift hurricane that sweeps away Life—vast hammer that crushes brain and heart and artery with its resistless weight—I drink to it."

"It is a noble decoction, Duke Balthazar," said the old fortune-teller and midwife, Madame Filomel, nodding in her chair as she swallowed her wine in great gulps. "Where did you obtain it?"

"It is made," said the Wondersmith, swallowing another great draft of wine ere he replied, "in the wild woods of Guiana, in silence and in mystery. But one tribe of Indians, the Macoushi Indians, know the secret. It is simmered over fires built of strange woods, and the maker of it dies in the making. The place, for a mile around the spot where it is fabricated, is shunned as accursed. Devils hover over the pot in which it stews; and the birds of the air, scenting the smallest breath of its vapors from far away, drop to earth with paralyzed wings, cold and dead."

"It kills, then, fast?" asked Kerplonne, the artificial-eye maker—his own eyes gleaming, under the influence of the wine, with a sinister luster, as if they had been fresh from the factory, and were yet untarnished by use.

"Kills?" echoed the Wondersmith, derisively; "it is swifter than thunderbolts, stronger than lightning. But you shall see it proved before we let forth our army on the city accursed. You shall see a wretch die, as if smitten by a falling fragment of the sun."

"What? Do you mean Solon?" asked Oaksmith and the fortune-teller together.

"Ah, you mean the young man who makes the commerce with books?" echoed Kerplonne. "It is well. His agonies will instruct us."

"Yes! Solon," answered Hippe, with a savage accent. "I hate him, and he shall die this horrid death. Ah! how the little fellows will leap upon him, when I bring him in, bound and helpless, and give their beautiful wicked souls to them! How they will pierce him in ten thousand spots with their poisoned weapons, until his skin turns blue and violet and crimson, and his form swells with the venom—until his hump is lost in shapeless flesh! He hears what I say, every word of it. He is in the closet next door, and is listening. How comfortable he feels! How the sweat of terror rolls on his brow! How he tries to loosen his bonds, and curses all earth and heaven when he finds that he cannot! Ho! ho! Handsome lover of Zonéla, will she kiss you when you are livid and swollen? Brothers, let us drink again—drink always. Here, Oaksmith, take these

brushes—and you, Filomel—and finish the anointing of these swords. This wine is grand. This poison is grand. It is fine to have good wine to drink, and good poison to kill with; is it not?"—and, with flushed face and rolling eyes, the Wondersmith continued to drink and use his brush alternately.

THE others hastened to follow his example. It was a horrible scene: those four wicked faces; those myriads of tiny faces, just as wicked; the certain unearthly air that pervaded the apartment; the red, unwholesome glare cast by the fire; the wild and reckless way in which the weird company drank the red-illumined wine.

The anointing of the swords went on rapidly, and the wine went as rapidly down the throats of the four poisoners. Their faces grew more and more inflamed each instant; their eyes shone like rolling fireballs; their hair was moist and disheveled. The old fortune-teller rocked to and fro in her chair, like those legless plaster figures that sway upon convex loaded bottoms. All four began to mutter incoherent sentences, and babble unintelligible wickedness. Still the anointing of the swords went on.

"I see the faces of millions of young corpses," babbled Herr Hippe, gazing, with swimming eyes, into the silver bowl that contained the Macousha poison, "all young, all Christians—and the little fellows dancing, dancing, and stabbing, stabbing. Filomel, Filomel, I say!"

"Well, Grand Duke," snored the old woman, giving a violent lurch.

"Where's the bottle of souls?"

"In my right-hand pocket, Herr Hippe;" and she felt, so as to assure herself that it was there. She half drew out the black bottle, before described in this narrative, and let it slide again into her

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pocket—let it slide again, but it did not completely regain its former place. Caught by some accident, it hung half out, swaying over the edge of the pocket, as the fat midwife rolled backwards and forwards in her drunken efforts at equilibrium.

"All right," said Herr Hippe, "perfectly right! Let's drink."

He reached out his hand for his glass, and, with a dull sigh, dropped on the table, in the instantaneous slumber of intoxication. Oaksmith soon fell back in his chair, breathing heavily. Kerplonne followed. And the heavy, stertorous breathing of Filomel told that she slumbered also; but still her chair retained its rocking motion, and still the bottle of souls balanced itself on the edge of her pocket.

7. *Let Loose*

SURE enough, Solon heard every word of the fiendish talk of the Wondersmith. For how many days he had been shut up, bound in the terrible net, in that dark closet, he did not know; but now he felt that his last hour was come. His little strength was completely worn out in efforts to disentangle himself. Once a day a door opened, and Herr Hippe placed a crust of bread and a cup of water within his reach. On this meager fare he had subsisted. It was a hard life; but, bad as it was, it was better than the horrible death that menaced him. His brain reeled with terror at the prospect of it. Then, where was Zonéla? Why did she not come to his rescue? But she was, perhaps, dead. The darkness, too, appalled him. A faint light, when the moon was bright, came at night through a chink far up in the wall; and the only other hole in the chamber was an aperture through which, at some former time, a stove-pipe had been passed. Even if he were free, there would have been small hope of escape; but, laced as it were in a network of steel, what was to be done? He groaned and writhed upon the floor, and tore at the boards with his hands, which were free from the wrists down. All else was as solidly laced up as an Indian papoose. Nothing but pride kept him from shrieking aloud, when, on the night of New Year's eve, he heard the fiendish Hippe recite the program of his murder.

While he was thus wailing and gnashing his teeth in darkness and torture, he heard a faint noise above his head. Then something seemed to leap from the ceiling and alight softly on the floor. He shuddered with terror. Was it some new torture of the Wondersmith's invention? The next moment, he felt some small animal crawling over his body, and a soft, silky paw was pushed timidly across his face. His heart leaped with joy.

"It is Furbelow!" he cried. "Zonéla has sent him. He came through the stove-pipe hole."

It was Furbelow, indeed, restored to life by Zonéla's care, and who had come down a narrow tube, that no human being could have threaded, to console the poor captive. The monkey nestled closely into the hunchback's bosom, and, as he did so, Solon felt something cold and hard hanging from his neck. He touched it. It was sharp. By the dim light that struggled through the aperture high up in the wall, he discovered a knife, suspended by a bit of cord. Ah! how the blood came rushing through the veins that crossed over and through his heart, when life and liberty came to him in this bit of rusty steel! With his manacled hands he loosened the heaven-sent weapon; a few cuts were rapidly made in the cunning network of cord

that enveloped his limbs, and in a few seconds he was free!—cramped and faint with hunger, but free!—free to move, to use the limbs that God had given him for his preservation—free to fight—to die fighting, perhaps—but still to die free. He ran to the door. The bolt was a weak one, for the Wondersmith had calculated more surely on his prison of cords than any jail of stone—and more; and with a few efforts the door opened. He went cautiously out into the darkness, with Furbelow perched on his shoulder, pressing his cold muzzle against his cheek. He had made but a few steps when a trembling hand was put into his, and in another moment Zonéla's palpitating heart was pressed against his own. One long kiss, an embrace, a few whispered words, and the hunchback and the girl stole softly towards the door of the chamber in which the four gipsies slept. All seemed still; nothing but the hard breathing of the sleepers and the monotonous rocking of Madame Filomel's chair broke the silence. Solon stooped down and put his eye to the keyhole, through which a red bar of light streamed into the entry. As he did so, his foot crushed some brittle substance that lay just outside the door; at the same moment a howl of agony was heard to issue from the room within. Solon started; nor did he know that at that instant he had crushed into dust Monsieur Kerplonne's supernumerary eye, and the owner, though wrapt in a drunken sleep, felt the pang quiver through his brain.

WHILE Solon peeped through the keyhole, all in the room was motionless. He had not gazed, however, for many seconds, when the chair of the fortune-teller gave a sudden lurch, and the black bottle, already hanging half out of her wide pocket, slipped entirely

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from its resting-place, and, falling heavily to the ground, shivered into fragments.

Then took place an astonishing spectacle. The myriads of armed dolls, that lay in piles about the room, became suddenly imbued with motion. They stood up straight, their tiny limbs moved, their black eyes flashed with wicked purposes, their thread-like swords gleamed as they waved them to and fro. The villainous souls imprisoned in the bottle began to work within them. Like the Lilliputians, when they found the giant Gulliver asleep, they scaled in swarms the burly sides of the four sleeping gipsies. At every step they took, they drove their thin swords and quivering daggers into the flesh of the drunken authors of their being. To stab and kill was their mission, and they stabbed and killed with incredible fury. They clustered on the Wondersmith's sallow cheeks and sinewy throat, piercing every portion with their diminutive poisoned blades. Filomel's fat carcass was alive with them. They blackened the spare body of Monsieur Kerplonne. They covered Oaksmith's huge form like a cluster of insects.

Overcome completely with the fumes of wine, these tiny wounds did not for a few moments awaken the sleeping victims. But the swift and deadly poison Macousha, with which the weapons had been so fiendishly anointed, began to work. Herr Hippe, stung into sudden life, leaped to his feet, with a dwarf army clinging to his clothes and his hands—always stabbing, stabbing, stabbing. For an instant, a look of stupid bewilderment clouded his face; then the horrible truth burst upon him. He gave a shriek like that which a horse utters when he finds himself fettered and surrounded by fire—a shriek that curdled the air for miles and miles.

"Oaksmith! Kerplonne! Filomel! Awake! awake! We are lost! The souls have got loose! We are dead! poisoned! O accursed ones! O demons, ye are slaying me! Ah! fiends of hell!"

Aroused by these frightful howls, the three gipsies sprang also to their feet, to find themselves stung to death by the manikins. They raved, they shrieked, they swore. They staggered round the chamber. Blinded in the eyes by the ever-stabbing weapons—with the poison already burning in their veins like red-hot lead—their forms swelling and discoloring visibly every moment — their howls and attitudes and furious gestures made the scene look like a chamber in hell.

Maddened beyond endurance, the Wondersmith, half blind and choking with the venom that had congested all the blood-vessels of his body, seized dozens of the manikins and dashed them into the fire, trampling them down with his feet.

"Ye shall die too, if I die," he cried, with a roar like that of a tiger. "Ye shall burn, if I burn. I gave ye life—I give ye death. Down!—down!—burn! flame! Fiends that ye are, to slay us! Help me, brothers! Before we die, let us have our revenge!"

On this, the other gipsies, themselves maddened by approaching death, began hurling manikins, by handfuls, into the fire. The little creatures, being wooden of body, quickly caught the flames, and an awful struggle for life took place in miniature in the grate. Some of them escaped from between the bars and ran about the room, blazing, writhing in agony, and igniting the curtains and other draperies that hung around. Others fought and stabbed one another in the very core of the fire, like combating salamanders. Meantime, the motions of the

gipsies grew more languid and slow, and their curses were uttered in choked guttural tones. The faces of all four were spotted with red and green and violet, like so many egg-plants. Their bodies were swollen to a frightful size, and at last they dropped on the floor, like over-ripe fruit shaken from the boughs by the winds of autumn.

The chamber was now a sheet of fire. The flames roared round and round, as if seeking for escape, licking every projecting cornice and sill with greedy tongues, as the serpent licks his prey before he swallows it. A hot, putrid breath came through the keyhole, and smote Solon and Zonéla like a wind of death. They clasped each other's hands with a moan of terror, and fled from the house.

The next morning, when the young year was just unclosing its eyes, and the happy children all over the great city were peeping from their beds into the myriads of stockings hanging near by, the blue skies of heaven shone through a black network of stone and charred rafters. These were all that remained of the habitation of Herr Hippe, the Wondersmith.

WHO IS
THE
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AND
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See next month's issue.

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THERE have been a number of complaints from you, the readers of this magazine, against the appearance of detective stories in its pages; not on the ground that such stories are not interesting, but because one can read detective stories in so many other magazines. Several readers express the fear that WEIRD TALES will lose the proud distinction it has held for so many years, of being "the unique magazine," the only one of its kind. Criticism was aimed especially against the Craig Kennedy story, which was given the cover illustration on our May number. That story, these critics complained, lacked weirdness, despite the suggestion of vampirism that underlay the story, and the terror-inspiring leap of the huge Sino-cat through the transoms to drink the life-blood of its victims. However, since in a very real sense this magazine belongs to you, the readers, we have commissioned Paul Ernst to write a series of super-weird detective stories around the characters of "Doctor Satan," the world's weirdest criminal, and his arch-enemy, Ascott Keane, the world's strangest criminologist. The first two stories about Doctor Satan (as he calls himself) are already in the printer's hands for our August and September issues. These stories are entirely different from any other detective stories ever printed. Doctor Satan is not a madman lusting for power, but is as sane as you or I; but he controls sources of power that no one without his trained super-intellect could ever hope to master. If these stories do not have you panting for more, then we don't know what constitutes a weird tale.

Vampires Should Be Real Ones

Julius Hopkins, of Washington, D. C., writes: "I award first place in the May WT to the concluding installment of Kline's serial, *Lord of the Lamia*. This story is indeed a splendid work of literature. *The Death Cry* by Arthur B. Reeve is a good story but not weird enough. I like the vampire stories to have genuine vampires—not the ones with scientific explanations, for they take away the true weirdness of it all. Bring back Jules de Grandin and his foes of the occult world. Jack Darrow, of Chicago, made a motion that we have a cover story contest. I second the motion, for I think it is a splendid idea. . . . I have not yet compiled my list of the twelve best stories ever to appear in WT, but four stories it will have on it for sure are *The Wind That Tramps the World* by Frank Owen, *The Woman of the Wood* by A. Merritt, *The Space-Eaters* by Frank B. Long, Jr., and *Shambleau* by C. L. Moore.

Weird Story Reprints

J. G. Roberts, of Chicago, writes: "Just a few lines of appreciation from an old reader of nine years' standing for publishing the greatest magazine yet. This is my first letter to the Eyrie, but I feel privileged to make a few comments on 'The Unique Magazine'. First I want to commend you on your recent policy of drawing extensively on early issues of WT for the reprint department rather than the dry and far from thrilling 'Old Masters'; i. e., Dumas, Shelley, *et al.* Now take the final step and eliminate the latter entirely. I am quite sure that a poll among the readers would find the majority in favor of this plan. If some of the stories you have recently reprinted are indicative of the contents of the very early issues, they are enough to make a rabid weird-fiction fan like myself frantic at having missed them. And I've missed at most only four years. Consider the recent converts. I am not selfish enough to request reprints only

from the first four or five years, yet I don't think they should be much more recent. Why not reprint serials? May I suggest that very excellent serial, *Drome*, by John Martin Leahy? I notice that this story was also requested by a gentleman in Boston some months ago. Another old feature that one misses was the double-page table of contents, with the quaint little picture at the top. Those little touches all went a long way toward making WT a truly *unique* magazine. Let's have 'em back. I was pleased to see that the lovable little de Grandin is to return to your pages. I did not care much for Thomas Carter. Seabury Quinn is just another writer when he leaves Harrisonville, but de Grandin puts him at the top of your list. Of course I realize that he must have to strain his imagination to find new plots for the diminutive Frenchman; yet although I have read about sixty of his yarns, I am far from bored with him. Tell him to forget Carter or risk losing the great popularity he enjoys among WT readers."

More About Our Covers

S. Y. Bryant, of South Bend, Indiana, writes: "For the second time in as many years I break my proper silence to put in my three cents' worth. The reason for this outburst is that old, old bone of contention —your covers. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the old familiar name spread across the face of that outrageous April cover. My first thought was that something had perhaps happened to our Mrs. Brundage; but no, there was the signature at the foot of the page. What on earth and the outlying planets is wrong? Has the pressure of eternal complaints from the few readers who objected to nudes finally overcome the editor's better judgment? Just because the 'anti-nudists' wrote more letters doesn't mean that they are in the majority. You know that it is human nature to condemn rather than to boost. Hence this letter. So long as things go to please us we keep still, but when we are displeased we send out the fiery cross and call the clan to arms. It is my humble opinion, as a faithful reader of long standing, that the April cover will elicit more complaints than *all* the undraped ladies that M. Brundage has painted. [It did.—THE EDITOR.] Now for a word of praise, now that I have that off my chest.

NEXT MONTH

The Drome of the Living Dead

By JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

WHAT horrible compulsion led the aviators of the Whirlwind Flight to fire on their comrades? What ghastly doom befell the gallant squadron of American war aces, to change them into living dead men?

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The stories seem to get better and better in every issue. The return of Craig Kennedy is a positive delight. Those two Binder boys rang the bell with *Shadows of Blood*. 'Twas one of the best stories of its type we have had in many a day. How does Howard manage to bring Conan to us so often and still keep him so interesting? The man must be a genius. I miss our old friend de Grandin. And when do we get another Northwest Smith story? He can't appear too often." [De Grandin will appear again next month, in *The Black Orchid*. Northwest Smith will shortly appear again in WT, in two amazing tales: *The Cold Gray God* and *The Tree of Life*.—THE EDITOR.]

Embarrassed?

Mary A. Conklin, of Coldwater, Michigan, writes: "Well, I'm back again and it's taking a lot of nerve, too, but I've made up my mind to become a regular contributor to the Eyrie. It's awfully embarrassing to have my letters printed, but I'll be disappointed if this one isn't. Such is human nature! I've just finished the May issue. . . . *The Flower-Women* by Clark Ashton Smith gets my first vote. It's light and fanciful and yet with an undertone of weirdness that gives it just the right flavor. It's the sort of story that leaves you in a dreamy mood, and after I had read it I laid the magazine down and didn't touch it for more than half an hour afterward. I was so afraid of losing the spell of that story. Clark Ashton Smith is a story-teller supreme. . . . The cover is rotten! Good gosh, it looks like the cover of any common detective magazine. What's the matter with Brundage, or is it the publishers, or perhaps you, huh? Has B. lost her artistic instinct or are you beginning to listen to the evil-minded old moldies? The cover on the April issue was even worse. For heaven's sake do something. I want my 'lovely ladies' back again. *The Bronze Casket* by Richard Hart was another fine story. The plot was a little old but the story was well told. I enjoyed it."

Where Are Those Gorgeous Covers?

Miss Lillian Kaltz, of Philadelphia, writes: "This is the first time I have written in to complain or praise. I shall do both. In reading WEIRD TALES regularly for four years I have never encountered a reprint or a new story to linger as much as did *Arthur Jermyn*, 'a reprint of eleven years ago,' in the May issue. When I started to read it, it seemed dry — but that ending simply knocked me for a loop and every once in a while it pops up again. Please give us more of H. P. Lovecraft. The ending of *Lord of the Lamia* was the very best. I felt sorry for the lamia. I like *The Bronze Casket* a lot. I would like to read more adventures of the Wandering Jew. And of course that divine Conan *(Beyond the Black River)*, but I like him better when he pursues some beautiful girl. When there is a love interest in a weird tale it becomes doubly fascinating. Remember that, please. Now for my complaint. The WEIRD TALES covers used to be so outstanding, and now, the last two issues have such ordinary scenes. The covers have always been so exotic in coloring and the girls so perfect that my friends and I started framing the gorgeous covers. People I knew who saw the pictures and had never read WEIRD TALES immediately bought a copy if not for anything but the cover—of course that was until they started reading the stories. Now just because some evil-minded people complain about the 'naked women' on the cover, the magazine loses one of its principal charms. If WEIRD TALES will continue with such terribly ordinary covers as the April and May issues, I know of many people who will not even notice WEIRD TALES on the news stands."

An Outstanding Issue

C. H. Cameron writes from St. Johns, New Brunswick: "The May issue of WT is so outstandingly good that I just have to write. There isn't a single story that I can adversely criticize, and several are so good that it is hard to make a first choice. I immensely enjoyed Kline's three-part serial, *Lord of the Lamia*. *Yellow Doom* by Robert H. Leitfred is a good example of fine science-fiction, much better than what is usually featured in the magazines devoted exclusively to those tales. I've always liked Smith, and though his *The Flower-Women* wasn't his best by a long way, it was unique and interesting. *The Bronze Casket* had the poignant twist-ending that is always the mark of better class fiction. I am very much in favor of a cover story contest as suggested by Jack Darrow. I would suggest that you bar professionals from the extra prizes, but have them compete; also that the

stories be limited to 2000 words or less, so that more examples of competitive writing could be published. Perhaps you may discover a new Moore this way."

A Reprint Nightmare

Jack Ward, of Abingdon, Virginia, writes: "About reprints. By all means use the stories from back issues. I got off of another magazine when it started running Poe and Verne for reprints. Enough was plenty. I enjoyed Lieutenant Burks' *Bells of Oceana* more than any other. It sure did give me a kick to reread it; for the first time I read it I was on an army transport, returning from the States to Honolulu, from furlough. I read the mag and passed it on to a very credulous recruit, who was on deck guard with me that night. Then, when I went off post, I told this boy that the story was true, and that it was the same ship and about the same place in the Pacific. I think I scared that boy (I was only nineteen myself) out of a year's growth. He sure did look it. By your last two covers it seems that the antinudes have won, and I don't like it. Let's get M. Brundage back with either the same model or another. . . . A story I would like to see as a reprint is *The Hounds of Tindalos*, from your March 1929 issue. I'll never forget it. The night I read it I rode a full-grown nightmare all over my room in a hotel in Frisco, and woke up the whole floor. My buddy and I came near going out on our ears that night, or morning. I don't know whether it was the yarn or what I had to eat, but it was a good riot while it lasted."

A Touch of Terror

Charles H. Deems, of Hill Top, Arkansas, writes: "I pause in the midst of my copy of WT to write this letter and, incidentally, to compliment Robert Bloch on his two stories, *The Feast in the Abbey* and *The Secret in the Tomb*. These stories were both well written, the former with a touch of terror that was pleasing, the latter a touch of eldritch horror. Both had a certain type of beauty. In coming years these stories, I believe, will be used as reprints, which is a compliment to any story. Talk about fairy-tales in weird fiction! Boy, *The Bronze Casket* was one! This tale takes first place with me. The ending of the story was superb; I never read anything like it before. Bloch's tale is just one place in back of it.

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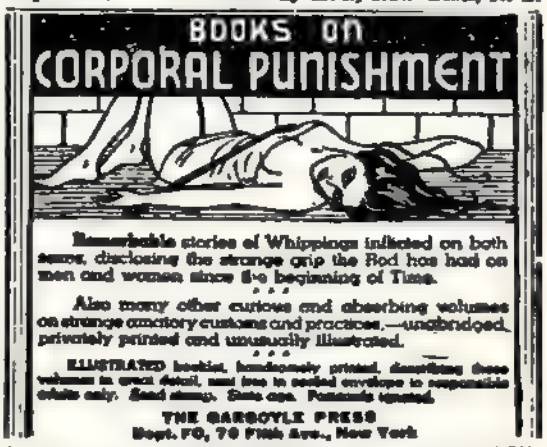

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The Sealed Casket by Richard F. Searight in the March issue was very interesting; it had the horror of the unknown in it, and after one had finished the tale it left him wondering about it. What could have been in the casket?"

A New Reader Comments

A. B. Gnaedinger, of Brooklyn, writes: "For nearly six years I have ignored your magazine in favor of a type which adheres more closely to the material sciences. However, impelled by some outré influence, I recently purchased a copy of your unique magazine. Suffice it to say that I will get the next issue. The best story in the May issue is the reprint, *Arthur Jermyn*. Judging by my rather limited experience, Lovecraft is the foremost modern exponent of weird fiction. *The Secret in the Tomb* and *The Bronze Casket* take second place; and *The Death Cry* and *Muggridge's Aunt* are third. *Yellow Doom* I did not even try to read. Perhaps I am prejudiced, but this story is all too plainly labeled with the familiar word 'Invaders!' The art work is fine. Keep up the reprints."

He's Eighteen Now

John F. Malone, of Jackson, Mississippi, writes: "Wow, what a shock I received when I read, in Robert Bloch's letter to the Eyrie, that he was at the tender age of seventeen. Sweet seventeen! Whew! *The Secret in the Tomb* is a masterpiece. With this story, Bloch takes his place with Moore, Smith, Lovecraft, and several others, in my estimation. 1935! It's already brought Bloch—who else will it bring? By the way, look at who 1934 brought. John Flanders and Laurence J. Cahill. Only time will tell. It seems to me that Fred Anger is unfair to Bloch. I suppose that if C. L. Moore had criticized Conan before his story, *Shambleau*, was published, Mr. Anger would have him on the rack by now. But please don't get the idea that I don't like Conan. I do, macrocosmically! And I also like Bloch. Get Mr. Bloch to give us a twenty-page novelette. . . . Someone made a comment in the Eyrie this month that more authors should use Arabian Nights incidents for their stories. Well, what about *The Bronze Casket* in this month's WT? If there wasn't a genie released from *that* box, I'd like to know what it was. Otis Adelbert Kline's story, *Lord of the Lamia*, is a story worthy of Sax Rohmer. I like Jack Darrow's idea of a cover story contest. It sounds O. K. By the by, I'll bet that Jack could write some pretty good stories himself. Why not, Mr. Darrow?"

Poor Covers

R. M. Gray writes to the Eyrie: "One of the most attractive features of your magazine WEIRD TALES was the colorful and artistic covers. Since you have discontinued them your magazine has lost some of its appeal. The covers now are cheap and uninteresting. They no longer call to the buyer's attention the fact that a new issue of a good magazine has just been published. It now looks like all the rest and unless you are particularly looking for WEIRD TALES you are apt to miss it. I rarely write and express my opinion on an editor's decision, but I feel impelled to in this instance because I thoroughly enjoy WEIRD TALES and would hate to see the magazine discontinued through loss of sales."

James Napoli's Illustrations

Jack Darrow, of Chicago, writes: "I congratulate you on obtaining the services of Napoli as one of your regular artists. His drawings have the true weird touch to them. I only hope that he is able to keep it up and not deteriorate. . . . Now for the stories. *The Death Cry* by Arthur B. Reeve is certainly not weird. Ever since I read it I've wondered how it found its way into the pages of WEIRD TALES. I've read stories in detective magazines that were weirder. . . . The concluding part of *Lord of the Lamia* by Otis Adelbert Kline was excellent indeed. You may mark that down as my choice for first place in the May issue. *The Bronze Casket* by Richard H. Hart was an excellent little tale, well written and interesting to the core. Same goes for Smith's *The Flower-Women*. Also *The Secret in the Tomb* by Robert Bloch."

Good Stories

Mrs. J. A. H. writes from Long Beach, California: "Although this is my first letter to you (or to any other magazine for that matter), I have been a regular reader of WEIRD TALES from the very first and never missed a copy throughout the twelve or thirteen years of its publication. My great regret

is that I have not been able to save all the copies, but as my husband is in the Navy we have to move often and far without warning, so it behooves one to shed all belongings but necessities. I have had to be content with getting the magazine regularly. Some stories you have printed I have disliked very much, others I thought were fine; so all in all and balancing the bad and the good we get a fine magazine all the time. I want to say too that the past year it has been the finest yet. My main growl at you is for reprinting such stories as *Frankenstein*. What a pitiful waste of space wherein a good fresh story might have been printed! Of such stories and authors the public libraries can satisfactorily supply the few demands for them. Poe, Jules Verne and the like are outworn and outmoded. We veteran readers of weird fiction prefer something new, not old reprints of the above-mentioned type. When I say 'weird fiction' I mean just that, and not any pseudo-scientific junk, where the story gets lost in the dank fogs of intricate descriptions of unworkable machinery. To me the story is the thing, not the meanderings of a pseudo-scientist. . . . Thank goodness I never have to peep between the pages of WEIRD TALES and wonder if the stories are *going* to be good, and worth the price of the magazine; I *know* they are. I do so admire the covers by Mrs. Brundage, do keep her on. However, I do not like this month's cover. WEIRD TALES is weird—keep it so, especially the cover, and don't copy detective stories covers. . . . I notice in the Eyrie someone wrote about having Mrs. Brundage do a cover and the readers writing a story around the picture. You asked for comments, and mine is that I think it would be a keen idea."

Verbatim

One who signs himself "A Steady Reader" writes from Clarion, Pennsylvania, with the following comments: "I have been a reader of Weird Tales Magazine for a number of years which I get at O. F. Diffionbachers news stand at Clarion, Pa., and I have never befor put in a kick or hollar about it or it ideas but I am going to now so here goes, in the May Issue you published a detective story are you going to make a detective story magazine a scientific magazine and such out of it or are you going to give the majority of it readers the kind they want Why not

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Poems—Songs

WANTED: Original Poems, Songs. MMM Publishers, Studio Bldg., Portland, Ore.

publish in it only weird and add a few more good ghost stories and stories such as the Lord of the Liama that was a real story such as makes you want to sit up till you finish, Why not get away from Detective, Scientific, Outer-space & interplanterary stuff, the news rooms are full of those kind of magazine now, if the majority wants weird (not Horror or blood curdling mysteriies) and ghost stories something that is not on the same lines of reading that is wore out or so far a head in the future if it ever happens at all that nobody cares a darn about it, why give us stories we do not want give us the kind we do want that is why we buy them not because they are made to sell."

Brief Comments

L. A. Chapin, of Aberdeen, South Dakota, writes: "As an art student and poet, may I say that your last three issues have been both a delight and an inspiration to me? . . . *Lord of the Lamia* is the best serial I have read to date. Not a dull spot throughout. *The Hand of the O'Mecca* in the April issue was also excellent."

Lucy M. Wilson, of Princeton, Illinois, writes: "Adding my voice to others that are asking for a reprint of *The Eighth Green Man* by G. G. Pendarves, is there any chance of its being reprinted soon?" [There is.—THE EDITOR.]

Henry Kuttner, of Hollywood, California, writes: "Best story in your latest issue: *The Bronze Casket.* A damn good yarn. Nominations for reprints: *A Mind in Shadow* and *The Ghosts of Steamboat Coulee.*"

Lester Anderson, of Hayward, California, writes: "*The Man Who Was Two Men* is the best thing Arthur Bernal has done."

Mrs. Grace Roberts, of Minneapolis, writes: "*The Man Who Was Two Men* has originality and humor. Let me add a special word of praise for the verses, *An Empty House at Night* and *Dear Ghosts.*"

Ed. Camille, of Erie, Pennsylvania, writes: "Please discontinue such stories as *The Death Cry.* They don't belong in WT. Give us literary fantasy only."

J. Connell, of Lowell, Massachusetts, writes: "I'd like to see more stories of Jules de Grandin, Northwest Smith and Conan. Have Howard bring back Solomon Kane—he was great. Couldn't Quinn write a story with both Tom Carter and Jules de Grandin appearing in it?"

Most Popular Story

Readers, which story do you like best in this issue of WEIRD TALES? Write and let us know. Or fill out the vote coupon on this page, and send it to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES. Your two favorites in the May issue, as shown by your votes and letters to the Eyrie, were *The Bronze Casket,* Richard H. Hart's bizarre story of the Wandering Jew; and the concluding installment of Otis Adelbert Kline's serial story, *Lord of the Lamia.*

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE JULY WEIRD TALES ARE:

Story	Remarks
(1)----------	----------
(2)----------	----------
(3)----------	----------

I do not like the following stories:

(1)---------- Why? ----------

(2)---------- ----------

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in WEIRD TALES if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1928	1929	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935
----	----	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.
----	----	Feb.-Mar.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.
----	Mar.		----	Mar.	Mar.	Mar.
----	----	Apr.-May	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.
----	----		----	May	May	May
----	June	June-July	June	June	June	June
----	----		July	July	July	----
Aug.	----	----	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.	----
----	----	----	Sept.	Sept.	Sept.	----
----	----	----	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	----
Nov.	----	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	----
Dec.	----	----	Dec.	Dec.	Dec.	----

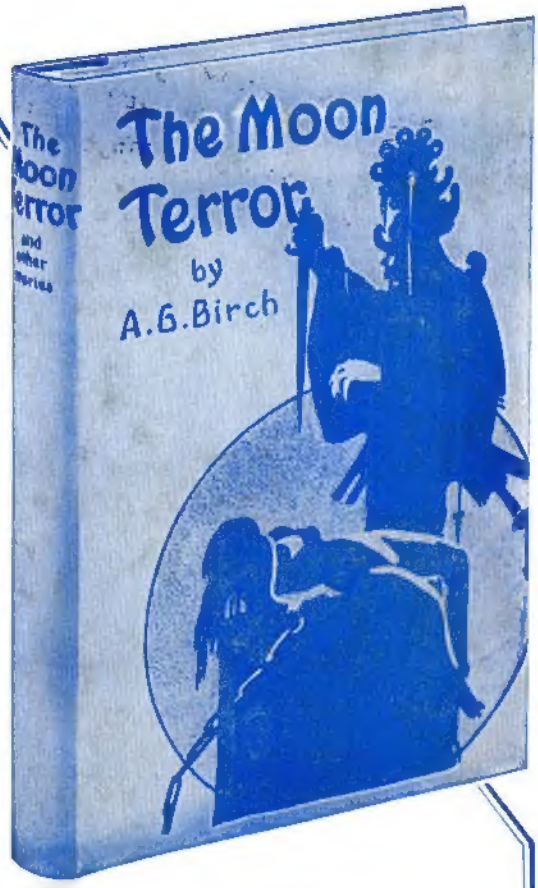
These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

WEIRD TALES

840 N. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois

The Phantom of the Ether

THE first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*



FREE BOOK

WE HAVE had many requests asking us to reprint THE MOON TERROR in the magazine. This popular story appeared as a serial in WEIRD TALES in 1923, and is too long to republish in the magazine consistent with our policy. To fulfill the wishes of many readers who have not had the opportunity to read this story, we have had it printed in book form and offer a copy free with each six months' subscription to WEIRD TALES.

A Valuable Gift

This book is beautifully bound in rich cloth, with an attractive colored jacket. It will make an excellent gift to a friend or a valuable addition to your own library. For a limited time, the Publishers of WEIRD TALES are giving this book away with each six months' subscription to the magazine. Simply send $1.50, the regular six months' subscription price for WEIRD TALES, and this book will be sent to you without further cost. *Limited supply, send today!*

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I enclose $1.50. Send at once, postage prepaid, the book "The Moon Terror," and enter my subscription to WEIRD TALES for six months to begin with the August issue. It is understood this $1.50 is payment in full.

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